A TRANSLATION OF SHAYKH MUḤAMMAD AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S STUDY ON *BID'AH* (HERETICAL INNOVATION) WITH AN INTRODUCTION ON THE AUTHOR AND HIS THOUGHT

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DECLARATION

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I declare that **A TRANSLATION OF SHAYKH MUḤAMMAD AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S STUDY ON *BID'AH* (HERETICAL INNOVATION) WITH AN INTRODUCTION ON THE AUTHOR AND HIS THOUGHT** is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

…… …….

SIGNATURE DATE

(MR A. FAROUK-ALLI)

ABSTRACT

The boundaries of normative Islam are critically explored in this thesis, which presents a translation of the most important aspects of a modern study on *bid'ah* (heretical innovation), by the late Egyptian Reformist Scholar, Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1917 – 1996). The Translator's introduction contextualizes the life and work of the Author and also briefly locates this particular study within the broader framework of classical and contemporary writings on the subject of *bid'ah*. Only the book's introduction, first three chapters (constituting the theoretical spine of the original work), and conclusion are translated. The first chapter is an introductory excursus into Islamic law, necessary to enable the reader to grasp the legal debate on *bid'ah*. The second chapter casts a wider net, examining the influence of foreign elements upon Islamic thought, while the third chapter deals specifically with the topic of *bid'ah*. The short conclusion reaffirms the importance of normative Islamic practice.

KEY TERMS

Bid'ah (Heretical Innovation)*; Sunnah* (Prophetic Pratice)*; Qur'an; Ḥadīth* (Prophetic Tradition)*; 'Ibādāt* (Acts of Worship)*; Mu'āmalāt* (Conduct)*; al-Maṣlaḥah al-Mursalah* (Public Welfare); *Sharī'ah* (Sacred Law); *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence); *Authentic Islamic Thought.*

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TRANSLITERATION KEY

VOWELS		
Vowel Sign	*Latin Equivalent*	*Pronunciation Guide*
ـَ	a	
ـِ	i	
ـُ	u	
ا	ā	Long vowel, pronounced as “aa”
ى	ī	Long vowel, pronounced as “ee”
و	ū	Long vowel, pronounced as “oo”

CONSONANTS		
Arabic Letter	*Latin Equivalent*	*Pronunciation Guide*
أ	a	
ب	b	
ت	t	
ة	ah	
ث	th	Pronounced like the *th* in think
ج	j	
ح	ḥ	Hard *h* sound made at the Adam’s apple in the middle of the throat
خ	kh	Pronounced like the *ch* in the Scottish loch
د	d	
ذ	dh	Pronounced like the *th* in this
ر	r	
ز	z	
س	s	
ش	sh	
ص	ṣ	An emphatic *s* sound pronounced behind the upper front teeth
ض	ḍ	An emphatic *d*-like sound made by pressing the entire tongue against the upper palate
ط	ṭ	An emphatic *t* sound produced behind the teeth

ظ	ẓ	An emphatic *th* sound, like the *th* in this, made behind the front teeth
ع	‘	A distinctive *ay* sound made in the middle throat
غ	gh	A guttural *gh* sound made at the top of the throat
ف	f	
ق	q	A hard *k* sound produced at the back of the palate
ك	k	
ل	l	
م	m	
ن	n	
ه	h	Pronounced like the English *h* but with more body
و	w	
ي	y	

1. Introduction

This thesis presents a translation of the theoretical aspects of Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī's important study on *bid'ah* in Islamic thought and practice. *Bid'ah* is best understood as heretical innovation in religious practice, and the concept is a central trope in classical and contemporary Islamic discourse.

Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1917 – 1996) was a renowned Egyptian reformist scholar whose life and work was devoted to the presentation and defense of Islam as embodied practice. As such, most of his writings are characterized by a serious engagement with the classical Islamic heritage, devoting much energy to showing its relevance to contemporary concerns.

Purely from the perspective of translation alone, this aspect of his work presents an interesting challenge for the translator, exposing him to a single narrative that combines both the classical and contemporary Arabic idiom. This is clearly reflected in the present study, in which al-Ghazālī quotes lengthy passages from the works of classical scholars like Ibn Khaldūn, Abū Isḥāq ash-Shāṭībī, and Ibn Ḥazm, to name but a few.

Furthermore, the study also contributes a unique theoretical perspective on the subject of *bid'ah*, which has not been adequately addressed in current writing on the topic in English.

2. The Text

This thesis is a partial translation of al-Ghazālī's *Laysa min al-Islām (lit. Not of Islam)*.[1] In this book, al-Ghazālī addresses a central characteristic of Islamic thought, i.e., the constant process of deviation and correction that it is continually subjected to. His book is therefore part of the genre of correction in contemporary Islamic revivalist thought. In this study, al-Ghazālī condemns innovation in doctrine and worship, but affirms the place of reason and public welfare in matters of social morality, while insisting that they should work within the limits imposed by the moral principles of Islam.[2]

[1] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1997), *Laysa min al-Islām* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam).There are several editions (by different publishers) of al-Ghazālī's many books in circulation today. It must therefore be noted that the publication date is not an indication of when the book was first published.

[2] Albert Hourani (1970), *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 370.

Chapter 1 provides an outline of the goals and methodology of Islamic Law, thus anchoring the study within the framework of the *Sharī'ah*, and providing the benchmark by which religious practice is judged later in the book. *Chapter 2* provides a brief excursus into the ebb and flow of Islamic thought and the various foreign elements that influenced its expansion and contraction. Al-Ghazālī draws extensively on the work of Ibn Khaldūn in this chapter. *Chapter 3* discusses the issue of innovation in religion (*bid'ah*) and is more theory-based.[3] The chapter presents a succinct account of the views of Abū Isḥāq ash-Shāṭibī, one of the most important classical scholars ever to write on the topic. These first three chapters form the theoretical basis of the book. In Chapters 4 to 6, al-Ghazālī shifts his focus to corrupt religious practices, discussing the provenance of distorted beliefs, acts of worship and customary practices pertaining to religious expression. Al-Ghazālī judges these practices in light of the theoretical discussion he presents in the first part of the book.

This thesis only presents a translation of the first three chapters – the theoretical foundation – and of the short conclusion, which is a moving reflection on the importance of embracing normative Islamic practice, even if one has to "walk the solitary path" as a result. Al-Ghazālī draws inspiration in his conclusion from a famous spiritual tract written by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyyah,[4] a student of Ibn Taymīyyah. In so doing, al-Ghazālī is able to emphasize the importance of a *Sufi* core in the reformist tradition, but a core that is stripped of the foreign accretions that have corrupted popular Sufi movements. In this regard, he is no different from Ibn Taymīyyah, who also maintained the importance of this core by what he referred to as *at-Taṣawwuf as-Sunnī*, i.e., a regime of Islamic spirituality and aesthetics based on the teachings of the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*.[5]

3. The Literature Review

Any review of the literature pertaining to this topic must necessarily consider what has been written on al-Ghazālī and his work, as well as what has been written on *bid'ah*, the focus of his study. Al-Ghazālī was an extremely prolific writer and has produced works in all the major fields

[3] In the original Arabic text, the chapter on Islamic thought appears as chapter 3, while the chapter on *bid'ah* appears as chapter 2. I have however swapped these two chapters, allowing for a much smoother progression into the central focus of the book, which is the topic of *bid'ah*.

[4] Abū 'Abdallah ibn Abī Bakr ibn Ayyūb Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyyah (nd), *Madārij as-Sālikīn Bayna Manāzil Iyyāka Na'budu wa Iyyāka Nasta'īn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī).

[5] Basheer M. Nafi (2004), "The Rise of Islamic Reformist Thought and its Challenge to Traditional Islam." In *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Suha Taji-Farouki and Basheer M. Nafi (London: I. B Tauris), p. 31.

of Islamic Studies, as well as an autobiography.[6] He has written on the *Qur'an*, the Prophetic Tradition, Islamic Spirituality, Islamic Ethics, Islamic Guidance, etc. However, in all these fields, al-Ghazālī's central focus has been on how the Islamic Intellectual heritage relates to the contemporary Islamic revival. As such, several noteworthy secondary studies have emerged on al-Ghazālī in the Arabic literature.

Fatḥī Malkāwī[7] provides a broad survey of all of al-Ghazālī's works, very much akin to an annotated bibliography. However, by its very nature, this work does not effectively integrate al-Ghazālī's work into its social context. Two later works undertake this task much more successfully. Shaykh Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī, the prominent Egyptian Islamist Scholar and Ideologue was a long time friend and associate of al-Ghazālī's and even regarded himself as his student. Soon after al-Ghazālī's death al-Qarḍāwī produced a reflective biography,[8] which not only provides deep insight into al-Ghazālī's intellectual output, but also into the context in which he wrote, and which most certainly shaped his ideas. A similarly illuminating survey of al-Ghazālī's work was also conducted by 'Abd al-Ḥalīm 'Aways.[9] This particular work groups al-Ghazālī's works under various themes and provides an almost chronological account of the various books written by al-Ghazālī on that particular subject. The latter two works also provide insight into al-Ghazālī's biography. They are well complemented by a short biographical article that was specifically aimed at outlining al-Ghazālī's life, written by Abdullāh al-'Aqīl, in the *al-Mujtama'* magazine in tribute to his life and work.[10]

Three more in depth studies that look at specific aspects of al-Ghazālī's work are also worth noting. Maḥfūẓ 'Azzām examines the subject of Islamic Doctrine in al-Ghazālī's thought;[11] Muḥammad Waqī'ullah examines aspects of al-Ghazālī's political thought,[12] and Nūr ad-Dīn

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[6] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (2006), *Mudhakkirāt ash-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī* (al-Jazā'ir: Dār ar-Rashād).
[7] Fatḥī Malkāwī, ed. (1996), *al-'Atā' al-Fikri li'sh-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī* (Amman: al-Ma'had al-'Ālami li'l Fikr al-Islāmī).
[8] Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī (1997), *ash-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā 'Araftuhū: Riḥlah Niṣf Qarn* (al-Mansūrah: Dār al-Wafā).
[9] 'Abd al-Ḥalīm 'Aways (2000), *ash-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī – Tārīkhuhu wa Juhūduhu wa Ārā'uhu* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam).
[10] Abdullāh al-'Aqīl (1998), "ad-Dā'iyyah al-Mujaddid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī." In *al-Mujtama'*, vol. 1296, 21/4/1998, pp. 46-48.
[11] Maḥfūẓ 'Azzām (1992), *ash-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī: Ṣuwar min Ḥayāh Mujāhid 'Aẓīm, Dirāsah Ḥawl al-'Aqīdah al-Islāmīyyah fi Fiqh ash-Shaykh al-Ghazālī* (Cairo: Dār aṣ-Ṣaḥwah).
[12] Muḥammad Waqī'ullah (1996), "Malāmiḥ al-Fikr as-Siyāsī li'sh-Shaykh al-Ghazālī." In *Majallah Islāmīyyah al-Ma'rifah*, no. 7. Ramaḍān.

I'zīz looks at al-Ghazālī's methodology of balance and moderation in his approach to inviting people to Islam.[13]

In spite of the tremendous impact of al-Ghazālī's work, there still remains a dearth of studies on him in the English language. There has been a constant stream of his works appearing in translation in English,[14] but not a single one of them provides a critical evaluation of his life and work. The most noteworthy effort in this regard is undoubtedly Ibrahim Abu-Rabi's work, which devotes two full chapters to al-Ghazālī.[15] Daniel Brown's work contains a brief, but useful discussion on al-Ghazālī's ideas on the Prophetic Tradition,[16] while Barbara Stowasser's article on women's political rights in Islam certainly acknowledges the influence of al-Ghazālī's thought.[17]

As such, the critical evaluation of al-Ghazālī's life and thought undertaken in the *Translator's Introduction* in this thesis takes into account the important studies outlined above, in addition to the secondary literature on contemporary Islamic thought related to it (listed in the select bibliography hereunder).

Reviewing the literature on *bid'ah* not only emphasises the importance of al-Ghazālī's present work, but also the unique perspective that it sheds upon contemporary writing on the subject. Once again, we encounter a dearth of material in English on especially the theoretical aspects of this subject. Maribel Fierro's article provides an excellent review of the Arabic literature on

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[13] Nūr ad-Dīn Ibn Rabīḥ I'zīz (2010), *al-Wasaṭīyyah wa al-I'tidāl fī al-Manhaj ad-Da'awī 'inda ash-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr).

[14] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1953), *Our Beginning in Wisdom,* Translated by Ismā'īl Rāji al-Farūqī (Washington: Octogan Press); (1986), *Remembrance and Prayer – The Way of the Prophet Muhammad*, Translated by Yusuf Talal De Lorenzo (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation); (1996), *Journey Through the Qur'an: The Content and Contexts of the Surahs (Abridged Translation of al-Tafsir al-Mawdu'i li-suwar al-Qur'an al-Karim),* Abridged by AbdalHaqq Bewley and translated by Aisha Bewley (London: Dar al-Taqwa); (1997), *Fiqh-U-Seerah – Understanding the Life of the Prophet Muhammad* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House); (2000), *A Thematic Commentary on the Qur'an*, Translated by Ashur A. Shamis (Herndon, Virginia: The International Institute of Islamic Thought); (2004), *Muslim Character: An American-English Translation of Muhammad al-Ghazali's Khuluq al-Muslim,* Translated by Mufti A. H. Usmani (Chicago: KAZI Publications); (2009), *The* Sunna *of the Prophet – the People of* Fiqh *versus the People of* Hadith, Translated by Aisha Bewley (London: Dar Al Taqwa).

[15] Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (2004), *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London: Pluto Press).

[16] Daniel Brown (1996), *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

[17] Barbara Stowasser (2001), "Old Shaykhs, Young Women, and the Internet: The Rewriting of Women's Political Rights in Islam." In *The Muslim World*, 91, Spring, pp. 99 – 119.

bid'ah from the classical period.[18] A similar (but not as thorough) attempt was undertaken earlier by Vardit Rispler.[19] What both studies have in common is that they attempt to identify the study of *bid'ah* as a unique genre in Islamic thought. While such an approach is certainly tempting for classification purposes, it is not very easily justifiable when considering the vast number of fields in which the topic of *bid'ah* is addressed, from worship, to doctrine, to legal opinions, to heresiographies. Three recent unpublished theses also need to be noted, not only for the interesting contemporary perspectives that they bring to the subject matter, but also as evidence of the sustained interest in the topic.[20]

In contrast to Fierro and Rispler's attempts to frame *bid'ah* as a unique genre, al-Ghazālī's study examines the topic within the context of Islamic authenticity and its quest for constant reaffirmation. This approach is also much broader than studies that view *bid'ah* within the parochial frame of religious praxis,[21] source methodology,[22] sectarian concerns,[23] or from the strict point of view of Islamic doctrine.[24]

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[18] Maribel Fierro (1992), "The treatises against innovations (*kutub al-bida'*)." In *Der Islam*, 69 (2), pp.204-246.

[19] Vardit Rispler (1991), "Toward a New Understanding of the Term *bid'a*." In *Der Islam*, 68 (2), pp.320-328.

[20] Ahmad Haris (1998), *Innovation and Tradition in Islam: A Study on* Bid'ah *as an Interpretation of the Religion in the Indonesian Experience* (Temple University: PhD Thesis); Asep Saepudin Jahar (1999), *Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi's Reformulation of the Concept of* Bid'a*: A Study of his* I'tisam (McGill University: M.A. Thesis); Raquel M. Ukeles (2006), *Innovation or Deviation: Exploring the Boundaries of Islamic Devotional Law* (Harvard University: PhD Thesis).

[21] al-'Izz Ibn 'Abd as-Salām (n.d.), *Qawā'id al-Aḥkām fī Maṣāliḥ al-Anām* (Beirut: Dār al-M'arifah); 'Abd ar-Raḥman ibn Ismā'il ibn Ibrāhīm Abū Shāmah (2007), *al-Bā'ith 'ala Inkār al-Bid' wa al-Ḥawādith* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Qur'ān); al-Sayyid Muhammad bin Alawi al-Maliki al-Hasani (n.d.), *Regarding the Celebration of the Prophet's Birth*, Translated by a Group of Ulama (MJC) and Edited by Shaykh Fakhruddin Owaisi Al Madani (Cape Town: MJC; IFECSA); Al-Sayyid Muhammad bin Alawi al-Maliki. al-Ḥasanī (1996), *az-Ziyārah an-Nabawwīyah Bayna ash-Shar'īyyah wa al-Bid'īyyah* (Mecca: Self Published); Nuh Ha Mim Keller (1999), *The Concept of Bid'a in the Islamic Sharī'a* (Bartlow, Cambridge: The Muslim Academic Trust); Muḥammad ibn 'Abd as-Salām ibn 'Abdallah an-Nāṣirī (2003), *al-Mizāyā fīmā Aḥdatha min al-Bid' bi Umm az-Zawāyā* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyyah); Vardit Rispler-Chaim (1995), "The 20th Century Treatment of an Old *Bid'a: Laylat Al-Niṣf min Sha'bān*" in *Der Islam*, 72 (1), pp.38-97; Tawfīq Yūsuf al-Wā'ī (1984), *al-Bid'ah wa al-Maṣāliḥ al-Mursalah – Bayānuhā, Ta'ṣīluhā, Aqwāl al-'Ulamā fīhā* (Kuwait: Maktabah Dār at-Turāth).

[22] 'Āyid ibn 'Abdallah al-Qarnī (2003), *al-Bid'ah wa Atharuhā fī ad-Dirāyah wa ar-Riwāyah* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm).

[23] Ja'far Muḥammad 'Alī al-Bāqirī (1996), *al-Bid'ah – Dirāsah Mawḍū'iyyah li-Mafhūm al-Bid'ah wa Taṭabbaqātihā 'ala Ḍaw Manhaj Ahl al-Bayt*. (Qom: Rābiṭah ath-Thaqāfah wa al-'Alāqāt al-Islāmiyyah); Aḥmad al-Kātib (2007), *as-Sunnah wa ash-Shī'ah – Waḥdat ad-Dīn, Khilāf as-Sīyāsah wa at-Ṭārīkh* (Lebanon: Arab Scientific Publishers); Liyakat A. Takim (2000), "From Bid'a to Sunna: The Wilāya of 'Alī in the Shī'ī Adhān" in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 120 (2), Apr. – Jun., pp. 166 – 177.

[24] Abu al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (n.d.), *Kitāb al-Llam' fī ar-Radd 'ala Ahl az-Zaygh wa al-Bid'* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Azharīyyah li an-Nashr); Aḥmad Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (1996), *aṣ-Ṣawāiq al-Muḥrikah fī ar-Radd 'alā ahl al-Bid' wa az-Zandaqah* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Qāhirah); Abū al-Faraj 'Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Jawzī (2004), *Talbīs Iblīs* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyyah); Muḥammad Ḥāmid an-Nāṣir (1995), *Bid'*

In his study, al-Ghazālī emphasises the importance of the historical dimension, which was touched upon by Ibn Taymīyyah[25] very early on, and more recently by Nāṣir ʻAbd al-Karīm al-ʻAql, in his series of books on *bidʻah*.[26] In his study, al-Ghazālī effectively relates *bidʻah* to the ebb and flow of the discourse on authentic Islamic thought. In so doing, he relies heavily on the work of renowned Arab Historian, ʻAbd ar-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldūn.[27]

By locating the question of *bidʻah* in the broader historical context, exploring the boundaries of authenticity, continuity and change, al-Ghazālī consciously adopts an atavistic (*salafī*) posture that affirms the virtue of judging Islamic thought and practice through the lens of the *Qur'an* and Prophetic Practice (*Sunnah*). Even though this position strongly emphasises the importance of tradition, it is also very much a central pillar of the modern Islamic revivalist movement.

4. The Translation Methodology

Translation is an elusive practice that is regarded by some as more difficult than writing.[28] In addition to meeting the challenges of rendering an accurate account, the translator must also strive to attain a level of fluency and aesthetic composure that meets the minimum requirements of the target language. It therefore comes as no surprise that translation theorists were from very early on fairly disinclined towards literal translation.[29] Etienne Dolet, the sixteenth century theorist who established the five principles of translation explicitly called for the avoidance of word for word renditions. A century later, George Chapman (1559 – 1634) made a similar plea.[30] More recently, Umberto Eco argued that central concepts in translation studies such as *adequacy*, *equivalence* and *faithfulness* are more firmly grasped when approached from the point of view of

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al-Iʼtiqād wa Akhtāruhā ʻala al-Mujtamaʼāt al-Muʼāsirah (Jeddah: Maktabah as-Suwādī); Abū al-Fatḥ Muḥammad ibn ʻAbd al-Karīm ash-Sharistānī (1998), *al-Milal wa an-Niḥal* (Beirut: Muʼassasah al-Kutub ath-Thaqāfīyyah).

[25] Taqī ad-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʻAbd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymīyyah (1996), *Iqtiḍā aṣ-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm Muhkhālifah Aṣḥāb al-Jaḥīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʻArabī).

[26] Nāṣir ʻAbd al-Karīm al-ʻAql (1996a), *Muqaddamāt fī al-Ahwāʼa wa al-Iftirāq wa al-Bidʼ* (Riyadh: Dār al-Waṭan); (1996b), *al-Ahwāʼa wa al-Iftirāq wa al-Bidʼ ʻIbra Tārīkh al-Islām* (Riyadh: Dār al-Waṭan); (1996c), *Manāhij Ahl al-Ahwāʼa wa al-Iftirāq wa al-Bidʼ wa Uṣūlihim wa Simātihim* (Riyadh: Dār al-Waṭan).

[27] ʻAbd ar-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldūn (n.d.), *al-Muqaddimah* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʼah al-Amīriyyah).

[28] Muḥammad ʻInānī (2004), *Fann at-Tarjamah* (Cairo: ash-Sharikah al-Miṣrīyyah al-ʻĀlamīyyah li an-Nashr).

[29] The best reference on Translation Theory, which also provides an excellent bibliography of the most important references, is: Mona Baker (ed.) (1998), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (London and New York: Routledge).

[30] Susan Bassnett (2002), *Translation Studies*, 3rd edition (London and New York: Routledge), pp. 58 – 59. This work provides a very useful synopsis of the history of translation theory.

negotiation.[31] The translation theory that informs the methodology followed in this thesis is derived from Eco's concept of negotiation. As he explains: "Negotiation is a process by virtue of which, in order to get something, each party renounces something else, and at the end everybody feels satisfied since one cannot have everything. In this kind of negotiation there may be many parties: on one side, there is the original text, with its own rights, sometimes an author who claims right over the whole process, along with the cultural framework in which the original text is born; on the other side, there is the destination text, the cultural milieu in which it is expected to be read, and even the publishing industry, which can recommend different translation criteria, according to whether the translated text is to be put in an academic context or in a popular one."[32] It is the translator who is the negotiator between the parties in this process.

As is clearly implied by Eco, negotiation, by its very nature, also requires cultural sensitivity. This point was made very early on by the ninth century Arab Polymath, al-Jāḥiẓ. As Sherman Jackson demonstrates in his study on al-Jāḥiẓ, the latter teaches us a significant lesson in his attitude towards translation: "in the process of cross-cultural exchange of ideas it is important to look at and scrutinize the conduit through which these ideas are passed. For indeed the transmitter is just as, if not more, important than what is transmitted. And while the target audience receives something via the transmitter, that something may or may not be a faithful representation of the same phenomenon."[33]

It is therefore worth reiterating that since all languages are culturally specific, any attempt to provide a literal translation runs the risk of offending both the original work and the translation itself. Eco illustrates this point very effectively by reflecting upon the English expression, *you're pulling my leg*. He explains that rendering such an idiom in Italian can only be achieved by "substituting an English leg with an Italian nose," since a literal translation would be absolutely unusual in Italian.[34] Sometimes, it is only by being *literally unfaithful* that a translator succeeds in being truly faithful to the source text.[35]

Two examples from the text under translation make the same point. In the introduction to his book, Shaykh al-Ghazālī, uses the term *Asrār ash-Sharī'ah*, which may be literally rendered as

[31] Umberto Eco (2003), *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson), p. 6.
[32] ibid.
[33] Sherman Jackson (1984), "Al-Jāḥiẓ on Translation" in *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 4 (Spring), pp. 100 – 101.
[34] Eco (2003), *Mouse or Rat?*, p. 5.
[35] ibid.

Secrets of the Sacred Law. However, this expression is more accurately rendered as *Principles of the Sacred Law*, not only because it is being used in reference to the science of Islamic Jurisprudence, but also because of the provenance of the term itself.

Islamic Jurisprudence is one of the most rational of Islamic sciences and a literal translation (more specifically use of the word *Secrets*) lends a mythological import to an expression that carries no such connotation. The term carries no such indication in the Arabic lexicon in this context as well. Any prudent student of Islamic Legal Philosophy understands that the expression reflects the epistemological posture of Islamic Jurisprudence, where revelation is given primary consideration over all other sources of law. On this basis, even the principles and objectives of the Sacred Law are extracted from revelation. Therefore in the Arabic idiom, the expression *Asrār ash-Sharī'ah* recognises the derivative status of the principles of the Sacred Law and is not intended to suggest something of a magical nature. Rendering the expression as *Secrets of the Sacred Law* would not only be incorrect, but misleading as well.

A second example relates to the translation of the title of the book on which this thesis is based: *Laysa min al-Islām* literally translates as *Not of Islam*. However, this translation is not only cumbersome in English but also lacks the nuanced import of the Arabic title, which strongly suggests limitations. As such, I would render the title as: *Within the Boundaries of Islam – A Study on Bid'ah*. This in my opinion far more accurately captures the import of the Arabic title.[36]

In spite of sometimes indulging in extra-judicious license, I have striven to produce a translation that is equally faithful to the meaning of the original Arabic text as well as to the lexical and syntactic requirements of the English language.[37] This has not been an easy task and, as always, it is ultimately the reader who will pass final judgement. Some clarification on certain aspects of the translation is necessary, so as to justify the liberties exercised in the process.

[36] Such license is not unprecedented. Shaykh al-Ghazālī's first book to be translated into English was entitled *Min Huna Na'lim* (lit. *From Here we Learn*), but was rendered as *Our Beginning in Wisdom* (translated by Ismā'īl Rāji al-Farūqī). al-Ghazālī's second book to be translated into English carried the Arabic title *Fann adh-Dhikr wa ad-Du'a' 'inda Khātim al-Anbiyā* (lit. *The Art of Remembrance and Supplication [as practiced by the] Seal of the Prophets*); this was however rendered as *Remembrance and Prayer – The Way of the Prophet Muhammad* (translated by Yusuf Talal De Lorenzo).

[37] I have benefited on the finer points of Arabic to English translation from the following practical guide: James Dickens, Sandor Hervey & Ian Higgins (2002), *Thinking Arabic Translation – A Course in Translation Method: Arabic to English* (London and New York: Routledge).

One of the first problems that English translations of Arabic texts have to resolve is the use of transliteration. The transliteration key above outlines the convention used, with pronunciation guidelines where these were deemed necessary. Unfortunately, there is no standardized norm for rendering Arabic consonants and vowels that have no equivalent in English. There is, however, broad-based academic consensus, which dictates that the long vowels **ā**, **ī**, and **ū** are rendered with a macron above the letter, as indicated. This is preferable to other alternatives, like the use of the double-vowels, **aa**, **ee** and **oo** for example, which is less common.

With regards to the rendition of the Arabic definitive article "**al**" (*The*) I have chosen to avoid the standardized, morphologically-fixed form and have accommodated the pronunciation conventions dictated by the occurrence of sun and moon letters in the Arabic alphabet. Where it precedes a sun letter, the "**l**" is elided and replaced with the first letter of the next word, to indicate the correct pronunciation. For example, the transliteration for the Arabic expression "The Sun" would be rendered as ***ash-Shams*** and not ***al-Shams***.

Certain Arabic words have become commonplace in English usage. In such instances I have chosen to use the common English spelling instead of the transliterated equivalent of the Arabic word. For example, *'Abd Allah* is rendered as 'Abdallah, *al-Madīnah* is rendered as Madinah and *al-Qur'ān* is simply rendered as Qur'an.

The citation of sources has also posed a challenge because Shaykh al-Ghazālī draws on material from various sources without providing full reference details. He writes with the urgency of an activist more concerned with making a point and changing the world than with providing meticulous citation, which would be more suited to a narrow intellectual audience and not the general reader that al-Ghazālī wants to address. In deference to his method, I have chosen to confine myself to the citations he provides and not to attempt to provide citations for other works he refers to. Furthermore, he sometimes quotes from English sources, providing his own Arabic rendition. In such instances I have simply translated these passages back into English. Although these passages cannot be regarded as direct quotes, care has been taken to ensure that authorial intent was clearly conveyed.

The present work is replete with Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions. I have relied upon the work of al-Hilālī & Khān[38] for the translation of the Qur'anic verses but have, at times, made certain changes to suit my own preferences. All translations of *aḥādīth* (Prophetic Sayings) are my own.

The citation (*takhrīj*) of *ḥadīth* sources in this work deserves special mention. Shaykh al-Ghazālī was not in the habit of providing full *ḥadīth* citations for the prophetic sayings that he utilized. This does not, however, suggest that his citations are random, or that they do not pay attention to the authenticity of the material in question. Al-Ghazālī followed a very specific methodology of authentication, even though he does not explain it in this particular work. If he found that a particular prophetic tradition was in total agreement with the *Qur'an* or with an authentic *ḥadīth*, he would have no problem quoting it, even if some scholars of *ḥadīth* regard it as weak or incredible. This is not the place for a lengthy discussion on the subject and the interested reader can refer to the introduction of the English translation of al-Ghazālī's study of the Prophet's biography[39] for elaboration on his *takhrīj* methodology.

Nonetheless, I have striven to reference as many of the *āḥādīth* as possible, in deference to the requirements of acceptable academic norms. Wherever possible, I have provided the source collection, the relevant book (or chapter), and the *ḥadīth* number. In tracing the *ḥadīth* material back to its sources, I have benefited tremendously from two Arabic websites that have archived a tremendous amount of source material: these are www.al-islam.com and www.dorar.net.

All writing is context-bound and this book is no exception. Al-Ghazālī produced this work in the late 1950s and it sometimes relates events that are specific to that time and which might no longer be relevant, important or even familiar to the contemporary reader. Certain liberty has been exercised in such cases and the text has been edited accordingly, excluding such material. However, this has only been done in instances where such sections were not part of the central argument. In some instances, these edits are indicated in translator's footnotes with the necessary elaboration.

[38] Muḥammad Taqī-ud-Dīn al-Hilālī & Muḥammad Muhsin Khān (1996), *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'ān in the English Language* (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam).
[39] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1997), *Fiqh-U-Seerah – Understanding the Life of the Prophet Muhammad* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House).

In order to root this work firmly in the field of contemporary Islamic thought, I have also included an introductory chapter that provides additional insight into the author's personal background and the socio-political context that informed his work.

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (b. 1917) died in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on 9 March 1996. He collapsed at the podium while delivering a lecture on Islam and the West, at a conference deliberating over Samuel Huntington's now infamous "clash of civilisations"[40] thesis. His death was mourned throughout the Muslim world and beyond. An obituary in *The New York Times*[41] bore strong testament to the far-reaching impact of al-Ghazālī's ideas and activism.

Al-Ghazālī lived an eventful life, regularly suffering censure, blacklisting, imprisonment and exile. He was a person of prodigious energy and intellect, and left behind a written legacy that included over seventy books,[42] ranging from erudite commentaries on the teachings of Islam and their application in the modern world to spiritual works enjoining personal conviction and practice.

Having held teaching posts in universities in Mecca, Qatar and Algeria, al-Ghazālī was also a devoted public intellectual, preaching in Mosques, appearing on radio and television, engaging in open debates and, towards the end of his life, even finding time to write two weekly newspaper columns in separate publications. He inspired an entire generation of scholars and activists and when death came knocking, it found him engrossed in the singular pursuit he had dedicated his entire life to: serving the cause of Islam.

While his legacy unquestionably attests to the fact that he was a man of unique genius, al-Ghazālī was also the product of a specific context. He was born into a world in which the vestiges of the

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[40] Huntington's thesis was originally argued in an article of the same title in the journal *Foreign Affairs* in the summer issue of 1993 and was subsequently expanded upon and published as a book; see Samuel P.Huntington (1996), *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks).

[41] Douglas Jehl (1996), "Mohammed al-Ghazali, 78, An Egyptian Cleric and Scholar." In *The New York Times*, March 14.

[42] Shaykh al-Qardāwī said that Shaykh al-Ghazālī wrote more than 60 books, while Jehl (op. cit.) claimed that he wrote over 90 books. However, 70-odd is the figure provided by al-Ghazālī himself. I am indebted to Ibrahim Abu-Rabi' for this figure (personal correspondence), which was stated to him by al-Ghazālī himself in an interview. For further details see Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī, (1997), *ash-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā 'Araftuhū: Rihlah Niṣf Qarn* (al-Mansūrah: Dār al-Wafā), p. 60. For an extensive bibliography of al-Ghazālī's work, see Fathī Malkāwī, (ed.) (1996), *al-'Atā' al-Fikri li'sh-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī* (Amman: al-Ma'had al-'Ālami li'l Fikr al-Islāmī), pp. 228 - 260.

Ottoman Empire were just about to be effaced, where a triumphant Europe majestically straddled conquered Arab and Muslim lands with shackles firmly in hand.

The Socio-Political Context[43]

The decline of the Ottoman Empire had a tremendous impact on Islam and the Muslim world. For the Arab peoples who lived within its domains, its dismemberment not only marked the end of an Empire, but also the end of a political, social and religious order that had shaped their patterns of public behaviour for 400 years.[44] It also resulted in a subversion of the role that the *'ulamā* (religious scholars) had played within the state bureaucracy.

The relationship between the political authority and the *'ulamā* class had been a tense one from the time of the establishment of the first Islamic dynasty under the Ummayads (661 – 750), when the clearest separation between the two first became apparent. After the rule of the first four caliphs after the Prophet Muḥammad (the so-called Rightly-Guided Caliphs), the "official" Islam of the state became more concerned with legitimising the status quo than with ensuring the preservation of the fundamental tenets of the religion. With the onset of dynastic Islam, the *'ulamā* class distanced itself from the politics of the state and claimed for itself the responsibility of being the preservers of the religion. These piety-minded representatives, as they were referred to by Marshall G. S. Hodgson, made their greatest contribution in the safeguarding of Islamic doctrine and the development of Islamic substantive law (*fiqh*).[45]

Nevertheless, the state often needed the support of the *'ulamā* to extend its legitimacy over society. The scholars were thus co-opted into the bureaucracy, holding posts as qadis (judges), teachers, muftis (jurisconsults), guardians of religious endowments, market inspectors and scribes.[46] In spite of this, there was always a segment within the *'ulamā* class that refused to be co-opted and who chose to maintain a critical posture vis-à-vis the state. This gave them the freedom to speak in defence of their religious convictions, free from any compulsion to defend practices or teachings endorsed by the ruling authorities. Although such individuals were often persecuted by the state for their rulings and for their refusal to be co-opted, they remained

[43] For a detailed account of the history of the region see William L. Cleveland (1994), *A History of the Modern Middle East*. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press). This section draws on Cleveland's study.
[44] Cleveland (1994), *A History of the Modern Middle East*, p. 157.
[45] Marshall G. S. Hodgson (1974), *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilisation (3 vols.)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), vol. 1, p. 238.
[46] Suha Taji-Farouki, and Basheer M. Nafi (eds.) (2004), *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris), p. 6.

important dissenting voices and while they may not have been very influential in their immediate environment, they left significant legacies that served to sustain those that followed in their footsteps. As a result, there was always some inspiration for reform-minded scholars seeking to challenge the status quo over the centuries. The ideas of such dissident *'ulamā* formed the fabric of a reformist tradition that remained intact throughout Islamic history, even if it was not always in ascension.

The rise of the bureaucratised Islamic empires of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries resulted in the incorporation of a large section of the *'ulamā* class into the state machinery.[47] Although this granted these *ulamā* a certain degree of influence, they were adversely affected by the sweeping transformation brought about by the attempts of the Ottoman Empire to modernise, especially in the late nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Modern education, modern court systems based on foreign legal procedures and laws, and modern economic practices all contributed to the traditional *'ulamā* losing much of their economic and cultural capital as individuals educated in modern institutions and influenced by new ideas began impacting upon society.[48] With the onset of modernity, the traditional Islam of the old *'ulamā* class thus had to bear the twin burdens of coping with a rapidly changing world transforming before its very eyes and the loss of the central authority that gave it its legitimacy and strength.

The onset of modernity also marked the emergence of a modern Muslim intelligentsia not exclusively dominated and influenced by the *'ulamā* class but influenced also by the Islamic reformist tradition and by Western modernity. Nevertheless, being deeply rooted in Arab and Muslim society and culture, these Islamic intellectuals self-consciously rejected Western imperialism and its accompanying secular baggage. Reform-minded Muslim intellectuals therefore had also to face a double challenge if they hoped to reconcile their faith with the challenges of the modern world: they would have to engage in an internal dialogue with their own rich past so as to draw upon the essential elements that defined authentic Islam, while simultaneously engaging in an external cross-cultural dialogue so as to understand and confront the challenges of a new and different reality that drew its inspiration exclusively from the West.[49] This was obviously not a universal trend and some Arab intellectuals chose to make a complete break with their Arab and Islamic roots, calling for a total embrace of Western modernity and

[47] ibid.
[48] ibid., pp. 6 – 7.
[49] Roxanne L. Euben (2002). "Contingent Borders, Syncretic Perspectives: Globalization, Political Theory and Islamizing Knowledge." In *International Studies Review*, 4(1), p. 246.

secularism. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī thus opened his eyes to a world in the grip of a painful transformation.

Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī: The Early Years[50]

Muḥammad al-Ghazālī Ahmad aṣ-Ṣaqā was born on 22 September 1917 in the village of Naklā al-'Inab in the Egyptian province of Buḥayrah, into a well-known family of traders who were devout Muslims. His father, Aḥmad aṣ-Ṣaqā, was a *ḥāfiz al-Qur'ān* (i.e. a person who had memorised the *Qur'an*) and was regarded as a pious man with Sufi leanings. He named his son Muḥammad al-Ghazālī in the hope that he would follow in the footsteps of the great 12th century reformer, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī. "al-Ghazālī" is not the family surname as many people erroneously believe, but an aspirational appendage to the baby Muḥammad's first name. He would nonetheless attain fame as Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, prompting his student and long-time friend, Shaykh Yusuf al-Qarḍāwī, to comment that the father's hopes had not been in vain as the 20th century al-Ghazālī carried the spirit of the 12th century al-Ghazālī.[51]

Al-Ghazālī's primary education entailed memorising the *Qur'an*, just as his father had done, and he completed the memorisation of the entire scripture by the age of ten. It was the beginning of a permanent and strong attachment to the *Qur'an*. He later recalled that he would regularly practise its recitation: as he strolled through the streets of his village, during his daily prayers, before he slept and in periods of solitude. He even remembered reading it from memory in its entirety during his incarceration. The *Qur'an* was to have a formative influence upon the young al-Ghazālī, being a faithful companion in the solitude of his early years and a wellspring of inspiration and guidance in later life.

After completing the memorisation of the *Qur'an*, the boy was enrolled at the Alexandra Religious Institute for primary and secondary education. In order to enable him to continue his studies, al-Ghazālī's father was forced to move to Alexandria with him. He therefore sold the little shop in the village – by which the family earned its living – and bought a bookstore in

[50] The best account of al-Ghazālī's life is his autobiography: Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (2006), *Mudhakkirāt ash-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī* (al-Jazā'ir: Dār ar-Rashād). A brief account of al-Ghazālī's early life and upbringing appears on his website: www.alghazaly.org. For useful biographical details see also Abdullāh. al-'Aqīl (1998), "ad-Dā'iyyah al-Mujaddid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī," in *al-Mujtama'*, vol. 1296, 21/4/1998, pp. 46-48; al-Qarḍāwī (1997), *ash-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā 'Araftuhū*; 'Abd al-Ḥalīm 'Aways (2000), *ash-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī – Tārīkhuhu wa Juhūduhu wa Ārā'uhu* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam). This section draws on all these sources.

[51] Al-Qarḍāwī (1997), *ash-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā 'Araftuhū*, p. 186.

Alexandria. The bookstore sold stationery, translated novels, school books, academic books, works of poetry and classical religious texts and played an extremely important role in the cultural enrichment of the boy. The young al-Ghazālī was a veracious reader, and his father encouraged him, guiding his reading by choosing appropriate titles for him. Much later on, al-Ghazālī fondly recalled this formative period and paid tribute to his father, who was "the hero of this phase…who sold all of his possessions to enable his son to gain an education that enabled him to serve Islam."[52]

Al-Ghazālī left for Cairo in 1937, after having completed his primary and secondary education in Alexandria, registering as a student at the College of Religious Sciences at the al-Azhar University, one of the oldest centres of learning in the Islamic World. Al-Ghazālī completed his undergraduate studies in 1941, but continued studying, specialising in Islamic Guidance and Propagation, and receiving a Master's degree in 1943. He also married while a student at al-Azhar, and was blessed with nine children over the coming years.

Al-Ghazālī's Intellectual Mentors

The movement of intellectual inquiry that sought to rediscover the intellectual principles of Islam and to explain their application to the changing world of the twentieth century was most powerfully represented in Egypt by the reformist Shaykh of al-Azhar, Muḥammad ʻAbduh (1849-1905), and his Syrian student Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935).[53] Both men had been deeply influenced by the pan-Islamist activism and thought of Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839-1897), who had left an indelible impression upon the entire Islamic world in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.[54] Shaykh al-Ghazālī acknowledged the impact of al-Afghani, ʻAbduh and Riḍā on his thought, and regarded himself as a student of the *al-Manār*[55] school of ʻAbduh and Riḍā.[56] Speaking about the three men in an interview in March 1995, al-Ghazālī explained his abiding attachment to them even though he himself was at an advanced stage in his intellectual career: "What I like most about Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī is his revolutionary fervour against authoritarianism (*istibdād*) and about Muḥammad ʻAbduh is his deep comprehension of the wisdom of Islam and his espousal of a conscious Muslim intelligentsia, and about Rashīd Riḍā is his combination of the teachings of the classical Salafīyyah of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn

[52] Al-Ghazālī (2006), *Mudhakkirāt,* p. 238.
[53] Cleveland (1994), *A History of the Modern Middle East*, pp. 113 – 124.
[54] ibid.: p. 118.
[55] Named after the influential *al-Manār* Journal established by Riḍā.
[56] Al-Qarḍāwī (1997), *ash-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā ʻAraftuhū*, p. 258.

Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and the modern rational Salafīyyah of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad ‘Abduh.”[57]

Al-Ghazālī was also directly influenced by some of his reform-minded teachers at al-Azhar. A thematic study of the *Qur’an* undertaken by Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abdallah Drāz (1894-1958)[58] left a deep impression on al-Ghazālī[59] and he would later produce his own thematic study of the Holy Book.[60] He was taught Qur’anic Sciences by Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Aẓīm az-Zarqānī[61] and the science of Qur’anic interpretation (*Tafsīr*) by Shaykh al-Azhar Mahmūd Shaltūt (1893-1963),[62] another towering figure in twentieth century reformist thought.[63]

However, it was Imām Ḥasan al-Bannā (1906-1949), founder of the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*),[64] who literally changed al-Ghazālī’s life. The Brotherhood was founded in Isma’iliyya in 1928 and grew dramatically in the 1930s.[65] By the end of the decade, it had 500 branches throughout Egypt and a membership numbering tens of thousands. The program of the Brotherhood was a mixture of the traditional and the innovative. It was traditional in that al-Bannā believed that the social and political regeneration of Egypt was intimately tied to the restoration of Islam as a guiding force in national life. Consequently, he called for the reimplementation of the *Sharī‘ah*, arguing that the ills from which Egypt suffered could be traced to the replacement of Qur’anic principles by secular legal and political institutions.

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[57] Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi‘(2004), *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London: Pluto Press), p. 430, fn. 1.
[58] See: Muḥammad ‘Abdullāh Drāz (2001), *The Qur’an: An Eternal Challenge.* Translated by Adil Salahi (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation).
[59] Al-Qarḍāwī (1997), *ash-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā ‘Araftuhū*, p. 110.
[60] This specific work has appeared in English in an abridged and full text edition. See Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1996), *Journey Through the Qur’an: The Content and Contexts of the Surahs (Abridged Translation of al-Tafsir al-Mawdu’i li-suwar al-Qur’an al-Karim)*, abridged by AbdalHaqq Bewley and translated by Aisha Bewley (London: Dar al-Taqwa); Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (2000), *A Thematic Commentary on the Qur’an*, translated by Ashur A. Shamis (Herndon, Virginia: The International Institute of Islamic Thought).
[61] Az-Zarqānī is the author of *Manāhil al-‘Irfān fi ‘Ulūm al-Qur’an*, an influential modern study on the sciences of the Qur’an that has become a standard reference text on the subject.
[62] For a detailed study of Shaltūt in English, see Kate Zebiri (1993), *Mahmud Shaltut and Islamic Modernism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
[63] Al-Qarḍāwī (1997), *ash-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā ‘Araftuhū*, p. 30.
[64] For detailed studies on the Brotherhood see Richard P. Mitchell (1969), *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press); Brynjar Lia (1998), *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt* (Reading: Ithaca Press).
[65] The brief outline on the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Bannā hereunder is extracted from Cleveland (1994), *A History of the Modern Middle East*, p. 187.

Al-Bannā's insistence on the restoration of the *Sharī'ah* did not imply a simplistic return to the past. Like Muḥammad 'Abduh before him, al-Bannā sought to find a way for Muslims to take advantage of the technological advances of the twentieth century without feeling that they were compromising their commitment to Islamic values. He argued that the *Sharī'ah* was originally formulated to meet a specific set of historical circumstances and was thus a product of informed human reasoning. In his view, the restored *Sharī'ah* would be subject to interpretation and would hence be fully compatible with the needs of modern society. Although al-Bannā's political proposals lacked specificity, they were still characterised by a powerful vision in which he called for an Islamic order (rather than an Islamic state) that – precisely because of its Islamic basis – would ensure social justice, economic well-being, and political harmony.

It is therefore not surprising that social justice, economic well-being and political harmony later also emerged as major themes in the writings of al-Ghazālī. It was, however, the deep understanding of the morality of Islam that immediately attracted the young al-Ghazālī to al-Bannā. Al-Ghazālī himself relates his first encounter with the Imām:

> [My first encounter with him] was during my student days at the Alexandria Institute. I had the habit of frequenting the 'Abd ar-Raḥmān ibn Hurmuz Masjid, where I would revise my lessons. One day, a young man that I did not know stood up and spoke a few words of advice to the people, explaining the prophetic statement: **"Be conscious of Allah wherever you may be and follow a bad deed with one that is good, to wipe it out, and engage people by displaying good character."**[66] His words were extremely moving and went straight to the heart. From that very moment, I strengthened my relationship with him and my activities in the field of Islamic service continued with this great man until he was martyred in 1949.[67]

Al-Ghazālī became a regular contributor to the *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn Journal* founded by al-Bannā. His writings left a deep impression on his many readers as well as on al-Bannā.[68] After his graduation in 1943, al-Ghazālī held several Masjid posts entailing preaching and administrative duties, but he remained seized with the plight of Muslims. From this point onward, he began earnestly to apply his mind and to write about the challenges facing Muslim society. However,

[66] *Musnad Aḥmad*, ḥadīth no. 20392.
[67] For more details, see <www.alghazaly.com>.
[68] Al-'Aqīl (1998), "ad-Dā'iyyah al-Mujaddid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī", p. 48.

the beginning of his intellectual career as a writer and thinker is linked to the appearance of his first book in 1947.[69]

Al-Ghazālī's Salafi Reform Agenda[70]

Al-Ghazālī's intellectual project is founded upon five core elements, or central pivots, that form the basis of his thought.[71] For al-Ghazālī:

1. The *Qur'an* is the primary source of Guidance;
2. The *Sunnah* (Prophetic practice) is the secondary source and serves to clarify the Qur'anic message;
3. Lessons need to be drawn from human history in general and from Islamic history specifically, especially from the life of the Prophet;
4. One has to be well-versed in human cultural behaviour and practice, both general and religious, in order to develop an understanding of one's context; and
5. One has to be in touch with existential reality, of both Muslims and non-Muslims, local and international, so as to be able develop an understanding of events.

The above might be described as a *Salafi*[72] orientation, a description to which al-Ghazālī was not averse. He, in fact, embraced it readily but also clarified what he understood by the term. For al-Ghazālī, *Salafiyyah* was an intellectual and emotional leaning that was linked to the best of generations and that had a deeply ingrained fidelity to the *Qur'an* and Prophetic Tradition; it musters the material and intellectual efforts of Muslims in the service of Allah's guidance, without any bias towards colour or ethnicity.[73]

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[69] Abu-Rabi' (2004), *Contemporary Arab Thought*, p. 223.

[70] This section draws primarily on: al-Qarḍāwī (1997), *ash-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā 'Araftuhū*; 'Aways (2000), *ash-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī*; Abu-Rabi' (2004), *Contemporary Arab Thought*, pp. 223 - 255. Abu-Rabi' undoubtedly presents the best account of al-Ghazālī's thought available in English, devoting two full chapters to his work. For a narrower focus on specific aspects of al-Ghazālī's work, see: Maḥfūẓ 'Azzām (1992), *ash-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī: Ṣuwar min Ḥayāh Mujāhid 'Aẓīm, Dirāsah Ḥawl al-'Aqīdah al-Islāmīyyah fi Fiqh ash-Shaykh al-Ghazālī* (Cairo: Dār aṣ-Ṣaḥwah), which examines the place of Islamic doctrine in al-Ghazālī's thought. See also: Muḥammad Waqī'ullah (1996), "Malāmiḥ al-Fikr as-Siyāsī li'sh-Shaykh al-Ghazālī." In *Majallah Islāmīyyah al-Ma'rifah*, no. 7. Ramaḍān, which examines his political thought. Nūr ad-Dīn Ibn Rabīḥ I'zīz's (2010), *al-Wasaṭīyyah wa al-I'tidāl fī al-Manhaj ad-Da'awī 'inda ash-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr), examines al-Ghazālī's methodology of balance and moderation in his approach to inviting people to Islam.

[71] Al-Qarḍāwī (1997), *ash-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā 'Araftuhū*, pp. 79 – 80.

[72] The Arabic word *salaf* literally means predecessor and the term *salafi* generally connotes an atavistic posture, where one looks back to the precedents of the earlier generation for guidance and inspiration.

[73] Al-Qarḍāwī (1997), *ash-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā 'Araftuhū*, p. 82.

It must, however, be acknowledged that the term *Salafi* is not without controversy in the current political climate and is intimately associated with the term *Wahhabi* in the popular imagination. This attitude is prevalent in both Muslim and non-Muslim contexts. In the latter, *Salafi* and *Wahhabi* are terms that are used interchangeably to describe Usama bin Laden's al-Qa'ida brand of Islam that shows intolerance towards any view that contradicts it. Within the Muslim community, the discourse on *Salafiyyah* and *Wahhabiyyah* is more nuanced but the tendency to use the terms synonymously is, nevertheless, still prevalent. Al-Ghazālī's self-proclaimed affiliation to the *Salafi* School is all the more interesting when one considers his vociferous opposition and infamous clashes with scholars who associate themselves with the teachings of Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (1703-1793), the eponym of the *Wahhabi* school.[74] It is therefore necessary to briefly point out two major trends within the *Salafi* School.

Basheer Nafi points out that it is not easy to determine the exact historical moment that gave birth to the term *Salafi*, but its conception can be traced back to the beginnings of the ninth century, with the emergence of the *ahl as-Sunnah*, the doctrinal school established by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (780-855) that re-emphasized the importance of the Prophetic tradition and marked a clear departure from the *Ash'arī* school of thought, which was deeply steeped in dialectic theology.[75]

Ibn Taymiyyah, the 14th century Hanabli reformist, was a central link in the development of the *Salafi* School, but it was only in the second half of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth that one saw the emergence of a self-conscious *Salafi* ideology.[76] This had been preceded by renewed interest in the teachings of Ibn Taymiyyah in the two holy sanctuaries of Mecca and Medina in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, where scholars like Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥasan al-Kūrānī (1616-1689) and Muḥammad Ḥayāh aṣ-Ṣindī (d. 1750) played important roles in

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[74] These clashes are documented in scores of articles and several books by al-Ghazālī, starting in the early 1970s and culminating in a major onslaught in: Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1989), *as-Sunnah an-Nabawiyyah bayna ahl al-Fiqh wa ahl al-Ḥadīth.* (Cairo: Dār ash-Shurūq). Daniel Brown (1996), *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 108-132, provides a useful English summary of this debate; al-Ghazālī's full study is now also available in English, see: Muhammad al-Ghazali (2009), *The* Sunna *of the Prophet – the People of* Fiqh *versus the People of* Hadith. Translated by Aisha Bewley (London: Dar Al Taqwa).

[75] Basheer M. Nafi (n.d.), "ash-Shaykh Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī: al-Iṣlāḥīyyah al-Jadīdah fī Ṭawr Jadīd" *Unpublished Manuscript*, pp. 7 - 10.

[76] For insight into the rise of Salafi Thought in 19th century Damascus, see: Itzchak Weismann (2001) *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill).For insight into the work and ideas of two important scholars that played a role in the *Salafi* revival in this period see: Basheer M. Nafi (2002), "Abu al-Thana' al-Alusi: An Alim, Ottoman Mufti, and Exegete of the Qur'an" in *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 34 (3), pp. 465 – 494; Basheer M. Nafi (2009), "Salafism Revived: Nu'mān al-Alūsī and the Trial of the Two Aḥmads" in *Die Welt des Islams*, 49, pp. 49 – 97.

spreading his teachings.[77] aṣ-Ṣindī created renewed interest in the methodology of the scholars of *Ḥadīth* and also made a strong impression upon a young student from Najd by the name of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (1703-1793) who, in turn, became the pole-bearer for this methodology in the Arabian Peninsula.[78]

By the late eighteenth century, *Salafi* thought split into two major trends, the first upholding the methodology of the *ahl al-Ḥadīth* and the second being representative of a reformist methodology that was far more dynamic and which was rooted in four principles, namely: the promotion of *Tawḥīd* (monotheism), reliance upon the *Qur’an* and *Sunnah*, emphasizing the role of the intellect, and the renewal of *Ijtihād* (creative intellectual exertion). Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī was a proponent of the latter reformist trend.

The main reason for al-Ghazālī’s clash with upholders of the *ahl al-Ḥadīth* trend was that they took the prophetic sayings as the main source for their vision of Islam, extracting a literalist understanding that ignored the rich critical jurisprudential methodology of Islam, which had developed in response to the contextual challenges encountered by Muslims throughout the ages. Therefore, al-Ghazālī points out that:

> Scholars who study the *Sunna* have laid down five preconditions for the acceptability of *hadiths* of the Prophet: three concerning the *isnad* and two the text itself
>
> - The *isnad* must be comprised of transmitters with good memories who are precise in respect of what they hear and then report it accurately.
> - As well as having an intelligent grasp of the text, they must also have unimpeachable morals and a conscience which fears Allah and refrains from any temptation to adulterate it.

[77] For further elaboration on the life and works of these two important scholars see: Basheer M. Nafi (2002), “Tasawwuf and Reform in Pre-Modern Islamic Culture: In Search of Ibrahim al-Kurani,” in *Die Welt des Islams*, 42 (3), pp. 307 – 355; Basheer M. Nafi (2004), “The Rise of Islamic Reformist Thought and its Challenge to Traditional Islam,” in *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Suha Taji-Farouki and Basheer M. Nafi (London: I. B Tauris), pp. 28-60; John O. Voll (1974), “Muḥammad Hayya al-Sindi and Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab: An Analysis of an Intellectual Group in Eighteenth Century Medina” in *BSOAS*, 38 (1), pp. 32 – 39; Basheer M. Nafi (2006), “A Teacher of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab: Muḥammad Hayat al-Sindi and the Revival of *Ashab al-Hadith’s* Methodology.” In *Islamic Law and Society*, 13 (2), pp. 239 – 241.

[78] For more on the Wahhabi mission in the Arabian Peninsula (later Saudi Arabia) see: David Commins (2006), *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I. B. Tauris); Madawi al-Rashid (2002), *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

- These two qualities must be applied to everyone of those who make up the chain of transmitters. If any chain is lacking in one transmitter or one of the men in the chain is unsure, then the *hadith* is less than sound.

  When the *isnad* has been found to be acceptable on this basis, then we examine the text transmitted by it. i.e. the text of the *hadith* itself.
- It must not be aberrant
- It must not have a fault which renders it unacceptable.

  Aberration arises when the text concerned contradicts a reliable transmission from a more reliable transmitter. When those with expertise see such an impairing fault in the *hadith*, that moves them to reject it.[79]

Al-Ghazālī consequently emphasized the importance of critiquing the import of the prophetic sayings and not simply limiting critique to the chain of narrators, thereby presenting a vision of Islam firmly rooted in its doctrinal teachings and moral objectives.[80]

Over and above this methodology, al-Ghazālī's work concentrated on three overlapping spheres within which he constantly shifted and which are reflected in his writings, all of which fall into one of these spheres. First, he showed tremendous concern with the Muslim context, i.e. the conditions within which Muslims found themselves. He therefore assessed the challenges that Muslims face due to their socio-economic conditions, their intellectual underdevelopment and their political subjugation. As a result, some of his earlier books bore titles such as *Islam and the Economic Condition* and *Islam and Socialist Methodologies*.[81]

Al-Ghazālī's second area of focus also relates to the Muslim context, but is more specifically concerned with the role of Islam in society. This category of work not only engages the problems that Muslims face but also seeks solutions within an Islamic frame of reference. Most of al-Ghazālī's writings in this regard were influenced by his political activism. When he was released from prison in 1949 he published *Islam and Political Authoritarianism*. After his disillusionment with Nasser's Free Officers' revolution in 1952 – which al-Ghazālī had fervently supported – he

[79] Al-Ghazali (2009), *The* Sunna *of the Prophet*. Translated by Aisha Bewley, pp. 9-10.
[80] Nafi (n.d.), "ash-Shaykh Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī: al-Iṣlāḥīyyah al-Jadīdah fī Ṭawr Jadīd," p. 14.
[81] Al-Qarḍāwī (1997), *ash-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā 'Araftuhū*, p. 11 – 14.

wrote a series of books that explored what Islam had to offer to society. These included titles such as *The Struggle of Religion* and *Islam and the Red [Communist] Onslaught*.[82]

The above titles should not be taken to suggest that al-Ghazālī had cast exclusive blame for the poor state in which Muslims found themselves at external factors. Indeed, the third trope in his thought is exclusively concerned with Muslim Self-Critique. In his reading of Islamic intellectual history, it is the Muslim political elites and the *'ulamā* who support them who came in for the harshest criticism.[83] Al-Ghazālī believed that after the collapse of the Rightly-Guided Caliphate, Islam manifested in two opposing trends: the first was *Official Islam*, which was the preserve of the political elite and which failed to come to grips with the essence of Islam. It was merely concerned with protecting the status quo. In contrast, *Islam of the Masses* was the expression of the majority, which made it a viable social and religious force.

Al-Ghazālī believed that Islam has survived because of the masses, who were in need of the kind of intelligentsia that would be able to create a new consciousness. Al-Ghazālī contributed to fulfilling such a role in Egypt during Anwar Sadat's reign. He took the initiative – with strong voluntary support from the public – to revitalize the 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ Mosque, the first ever mosque built in Egypt and undoubtedly its largest, after neglect had left it in a poor state. The Friday Prayer in this mosque, which was led by al-Ghazālī and followed by hundreds of thousands of Cairenes, was transformed into a weekly event that reflected the depth of the Islamic revivalist movement of the 1970's.[84]

Al-Ghazālī further believed that this new consciousness could only be initiated after a process of self-critique.[85] In this regard, he was of the opinion that the most dangerous phenomenon facing Islam was corrupt religiosity, and he believed that the only way to remedy deviant religious practice was to engage the intellectual and spiritual blemishes that caused this calamity. As such, many of his books battled against these practices, whether institutional or popular (al-Qarḍāwī 1997: 58).[86] Our present work fits into this category, with al-Ghazālī addressing both institutional and popular practices which he believed needed revision in light of the authentic teachings of Islam.

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[82] ibid.: p. 47.
[83] Abu-Rabi' (2004), *Contemporary Arab Thought*, pp. 228 – 229.
[84] Bashīr M. Nāfī (2010), *al-Islāmiyyūn* (Beirut: Dār al-'Arabiyyah li'l-'Ulūm), pp. 107 – 108.
[85] Abu-Rabi' (2004), *Contemporary Arab Thought*, p. 230.
[86] Al-Qarḍāwī (1997), *ash-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā 'Araftuhū*, p. 58.

Al-Ghazālī's Legacy

Shaykh al-Ghazālī's legacy remains extremely relevant at the contemporary juncture of Islamic intellectual development, and his *Salafi* reformist agenda still inspires Islamists all over the world. While some scholars prematurely pronounced the failure of political Islam,[87] developments in many Muslim countries suggest otherwise. The introduction of democratic practices and representative political systems of governance has given the upper hand to Islamists. Unfortunately, this drew them into a fierce battle with the hegemonic global political order – led by the United States, and made them targets in the US' "war on terror", which increasingly appears to be no more than a euphemism for a war against an Islamic worldview that grows all the more assertive.

In this tense atmosphere, al-Ghazālī's legacy provides many important lessons. Perhaps the most important is that Islamic reformation begins with the self, where the individual's struggle against corrupt religious practice is as important as the struggle against corrupt political elites and the *ulamā* that grant them legitimacy.

The Present Study

In this book, al-Ghazālī addresses a central characteristic of Islamic thought, i.e., the constant process of deviation and correction that it is continually subjected to. The specific focus of this study is the subject of *bid'ah*, which is best understood as heretical innovation in matters related to religious practice.[88] His book is therefore part of the genre of correction in contemporary Islamic revivalist thought.[89]

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[87] In this regard, see, for example: Olivier Roy (1994), *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), which passes rather premature judgement on the demise of Political Islam. For a more sober, historically grounded assessment, which argues that Political Islam is still very much in ascendance, see: Nāfī (2010), *al-Islāmiyyūn*.

[88] Two important scholarly articles provide an excellent review of writings on *bid'ah* in the classical period; see: Vardit Rispler (1991), "Toward a New Understanding of the Term *bid'a*" in *Der Islam*, 68 (2), pp.320-328; Maribel Fierro (1992), "The treatises against innovations (*kutub al-bida'*)" in *Der Islam*, 69 (2), pp.204-246. In addition to these articles, three recent unpublished theses also explore the subject from interesting contemporary perspectives; see: Ahmad Haris (1998), *Innovation and Tradition in Islam: A Study on* Bid'ah *as an Interpretation of the Religion in the Indonesian Experience* (Temple University: PhD Thesis); Asep Saepudin Jahar (1999), *Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi's Reformulation of the Concept of* Bid'a*: A Study of his* I'tisam (McGill University: M.A. Thesis); Raquel M. Ukeles (2006), *Innovation or Deviation: Exploring the Boundaries of Islamic Devotional Law* (Harvard University: PhD Thesis).

[89] For an interesting reflection on *Ijtihād* and *Bid'ah* as central concepts in the process of continuity and change in Islamic thought see: Umar F. Abd-Allah (2007), "Creativity, Innovation and Heresy in Islam," in *Voices of Islam (Volume 5): Voices of Change,* General Editor Vincent J. Cornell, Volume Editor Omid

Although the term *bid'ah* is frequently encountered in the sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad (SAW), it only became an established legal category with the emergence of the early schools of Islamic Jurisprudence. However, the term was not utilised uniformly and manifested in two distinct paradigms, which can be traced back to two opposing positions held by Imām Mālik ibn Anas (d. 795), founder of the Mālikī School of Thought, and Imām Muḥammad ibn Idrīs ash-Shāfi'ī (d. 820), founder of the Shāfi'ī School.[90] Mālik's approach is best described as a *Normative Paradigm*, and represents continuity with the Prophetic *aḥadīth* that view *bid'ah* as a negative concept, or something contrary to the *sunnah*.[91] According to this paradigm, the central problem with *bid'ah* is that it represents a misguided attempt to gain closeness to Allah by means that Allah did not legislate.[92]

Ash-Shāfi'ī's approach to *bid'ah* is best formulated as a *Descriptive Paradigm*, because even though he was extremely devoted to asserting the Prophet's *sunnah* as the most authoritative source of law after the *Qur'an*, he did establish a basis for allowing new practices by distinguishing between positive and negative types of innovation,[93] thereby opening a space for what popularly became known as *bid'ah ḥasanah* (a good innovation). This descriptive approach was later refined and *bid'ah* came to be evaluated according to the five ethical categories of Islamic Jurisprudence: *wājib* (obligatory), *mandub* (recommended), *mubāḥ* (neutral), *makrūh* (disliked) and *ḥarām* (forbidden).[94]

The most important landmark in the study of *bid'ah* in the classical age is undoubtedly the work of Abū Isḥāq ash-Shāṭibī, the fourteenth century Mālikī Jurist. Ash-Shāṭibī's book, *al-'Itiṣām* (The Refuge)[95], represents the culmination of several centuries of juristic writing against *bid'ah*

Safi (Westport, Connecticut; London: Praeger), p 15. Abd-Allah calls for an authentic and sophisticated understanding of *Bid'ah* as a control mechanism and *Ijtihād* as an inducement for creativity.

[90] Ukeles (2006), *Innovation or Deviation,* p. 91.

[91] ibid., pp. 152 – 199, for a detailed account of the *Normative Paradigm* and the scholars that support it.

[92] ibid., p. 196.

[93] ibid., pp. 93 – 94, and pp. 120 – 152, for a detailed account of the *Descriptive Paradigm* and the scholars that advocate it.

[94] This categorisation was formulated by the influential Shāfi'ī Jurist, al-'Izz ibn 'Abd as-Salām, see: (n.d.) *Qawā'id al-Aḥkām fī Maṣāliḥ al-Anām* (Beirut: Dār al-M'arifah).

[95] See: Abū Isḥāq ash-Shāṭibī (n.d.), *al-'Itiṣām* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr). This book has appeared in many editions by various publishers, all of which draw on Rashīd Riḍā's first edition, which was published in 1913. In addition to the full length text, several abridged versions of the book have also been published over the years. One of the earliest abridgements is: Muḥammad Aḥmad al-'Adawī (1921), *Ṭarīq al-Wuṣūl ilā Ibṭāl al-Bid' bi-'Ilm al-Uṣūl*. This same text was reprinted as: Muḥammad Aḥmad al-'Adawī (1985), *Uṣūl al-Bid' wa as-Sunan* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī); Shaykh al-Ghazālī makes reference to this work in

and its most sophisticated articulation.[96] This work became extremely influential in the modern period, primarily due to the influence of Muḥammad ‘Abduh.[97] ‘Abduh was a great admirer of ash-Shāṭibī’s work and promoted it vigorously amongst his students.[98] Therefore, it comes as no surprise that it should be ‘Abduh’s principle disciple, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, who undertook the task of editing and publishing the first edition of *al-‘Itiṣām*.[99]

Ash-Shāṭibī’s study on *bid‘ah* influenced all of ‘Abduh’s disciples thereafter and this influence is manifestly reflected in al-Ghazālī’s text as well. As such, there is a clearly discernable lineage of scholars stretching from ‘Abduh, to Riḍā, to Shaykh ‘Alī Maḥfūẓ[100], to al-Bannā[101], to Maḥmūd Shaltūt (who is quoted at length in this particular work), to al-Ghazālī (in this present study), all of whom locate *bid‘ah* firmly within the reformist tradition.

Like ash-Shāṭibī and his illustrious predecessors, Shaykh al-Ghazālī also advocates the *Normative Paradigm* when dealing with the question of *bid‘ah*. In this study, al-Ghazālī condemns innovation in doctrine and worship, but affirms the place of reason and public welfare in matters of social morality, while insisting that they should work within the limits imposed by the moral principles of Islam.[102]

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the present study. The most recent abridgement of the text is: Abū Isḥāq ash-Shāṭibī (1997), *Mukhtaṣar al-‘Itiṣām*. Abridged and Edited by ‘Alawī ibn ‘Abd al-Qādir as-Saqqāf (Kingdom of Saudia Arabia: Dār al-Hijrah li an-Nashr wa at-Tawzī’).

[96] Ukeles (2006), *Innovation or Deviation,* p. 107.

[97] Rachel Ukeles argues that modern scholarly interest in ash-Shāṭibī can be traced back to the writings of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā; see: Ukeles (2006), *Innovation or Deviation,* p. 299, fn. 1. However, it was in fact ‘Abduh who exposed Riḍā and his other disciples to the work of ash-Shāṭibī.

[98] Shaykh ‘Adullāh Drāz, a student of ‘Abduh’s (and whose son Muḥammad was one of al-Ghazālī’s mentors), states as much in his introduction to ash-Shāṭibī’s (1997) *magnum opus* on Islamic Legal theory. See: Abū Isḥāq ash-Shāṭibī (1994), *al-Muwāfiqāt fī Uṣūl ash-Sharī‘ah* (Beirut: Dār al-M’arifah).

[99] For more details see: Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1911), “at-Ta‘rīf bi-Kitāb al-‘Itiṣām” in *al-Manār*, 17(10), pp. 745 – 749.

[100] ‘Alī Maḥfūẓ (2001), *al-Ibdā‘ fī Maḍār al-Ibtidā‘* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutb al-‘Ilmiyyah).

[101] Ḥasan al-Bannā (1989), *Sharḥ al-‘Uṣūl al-‘Ishrīn* (Cairo: Dār ‘Imār li an-Nashr wa at-Tawzī’).

[102] Albert Hourani (1970), *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 370.

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE COMPASSIONATE, THE DISPENSER OF GRACE

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

This book encompasses inquiries in the field of jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Custom dictates that this subject be studied at specialist institutions by students of religion. I have decided to project a more general character upon the subject, to bring it within the reach of the majority of readers and to free it, as far as possible, from technical terminology. I have faithfully observed the meticulous transmission of absolute facts, even though I may slightly overstep the bounds in expression and presentation.

The great lack of understanding that exists amongst contemporary readers has been the incentive for this study. Today's readers peruse a wealth of subjects in everyday life: on nutrition, medicine, economics, philosophy, and literature. Books and newspapers have managed to bring within the reach of ordinary readers matters that have been the preserve of specialists. We might ask why, then, has the lay reader not been as fortunate as far as deep Islamic knowledge is concerned? For how long will our readers remain impoverished of understanding religious judgements that are predominated by legal rules?

This book is not intended as an exposition of the principles of the Sacred Law (*Sharī'ah*). It is, rather, a warning that draws attention to the strange additions that have attached themselves to the *Sharī'ah* and which are, most definitely, not part of it.

The persistence of these innovations requires of me, first, to draw a general map of the essence of Islam and to lay down sound guidelines pertaining to the facets of belief (*'aqā'id*), worship (*'ibādāt*) and customs (*'ādāt*). The extraction of the fundamental core of these additions, which clash with the essence of Islam, also requires me to delve somewhat into the study of the Principles of Source Methodology in Islamic Law (*Uṣūl al-Fiqh*).

The lay person should not be taken aback by this approach and should strive to embrace it so that he may come to know his religion well and learn to separate religious superstition from true understanding. In recent times, more people have gained literacy in fields that have

conventionally been monopolized by specialists. The widening of cultural horizons and the lifting of impediments to education have made this easy for anyone that has the will to learn.

We want to draw Muslims closer to the various disciplines of knowledge that have previously been inaccessible, but which should have been in widespread circulation. This liberal approach is the best way to serve Islam and to strengthen its followers. Let us elevate the general level of understanding and push forward the renaissance!

This book may anger rigid readers who are not grounded in the religious sciences. It reflects the efforts of luminaries that have struggled for a long time to awaken the Islamic intellect but have since passed on without having achieved much success. If there may be any anger directed at us as a consequence of this effort, so be it. We only do justice to the truth so that the individual may act upon it, even if the majority of Muslims are unable to.

MUḤAMMAD AL-GHAZĀLĪ

CHAPTER ONE: ISLAMIC LAW – GOALS AND METHODOLOGY

Tolerance and Love

The laws and obligations that Allah has determined for his servants are founded upon an all-encompassing Mercy, in a manner that does not overburden or lead to partiality. A father may be harsh to his children out of ignorance. He may even treat them unfairly, as human nature sometimes tarnishes his judgement with self-centeredness and poor intent. As for the Lord of all creation, He only legislates that which brings upon His servants pure goodness and ensures their absolute wellbeing. Allah's Compassion for humankind is coupled with complete Self-sufficiency, with no dependence upon them for anything. His Guidance is an all-encompassing circle that safeguards their livelihoods and uplifts their standing.

Humankind began as a breath from Allah's Own Spirit. Guarding this honourable lineage and preserving this elevated bond are the secrets that control human behaviour, protecting us from contemptibility, obligating upon us piety, and, in the end, qualifying us for the Garden whose expanse is that of the Heavens and the Earth.

Allah wants humankind to represent Him on His earth and He places thereupon well-established scholars that make it a graceful resting place for discovering Him and for the implementation of His order. Discovering Allah and implementing His order is a path that leads to guidance that benefits humankind and is the first and last support for the wellbeing of human beings. If human beings were left to their own desires, they would stoop to the lowest depths, living far beyond Allah's laws in a pit darkened by savagery, uncertainty, and oppression.

In the words of Ibn Qayyim: "The *Sharī'ah* (Sacred Law) is based upon wisdom and the wellbeing of Allah's servants in this world and the hereafter. It encompasses complete justice, mercy, and wellbeing in its entirety. Any issue that moves away from justice to tyranny or from mercy to that which is opposed to it, or from wellbeing to harm, or from wisdom to futility is not part of the *Sharī'ah*, even if it has been imposed upon it by means of interpretation. This *Sharī'ah* is Allah's justice towards His servants, His mercy amongst His creation, His shadow upon this earth of His, and His wisdom, indicative of His existence and the truthfulness of His messengers."

The truth of the matter is that humankind's impression of Allah's law is in need of substantial correction. Most people regard it as a blaze of anger and are stung by its severity and frightened by its grimness. There is a perception that the principles and divisions of the law are somewhat obscure. It is, therefore, sometimes perceived to challenge rationality and is met with a fear equal to that of disbelief. This is a huge mistake. The religion of Islam is a breath of Allah's Mercy and should be met with the cheerfulness with which any grace is embraced. The ideas of short-sighted puritans, who only approach religious truths fleetingly should be left aside and ignored.

Islam is truth and beauty. Take heed of the words of Allah, the Most High: **"These are the verses of the *Qur'an* and (it is) a clear Book; a guide and glad tidings for the believers" (Q. 27: 1-2).**

Guidance cannot be accompanied by falsehood, nor glad tidings by disgrace. As The Great and Almighty says: **"And We have sent down to you the Book (*Qur'an*) as an exposition of everything, a guidance, a mercy, and glad tidings for those who have submitted themselves (to Allah as Muslims)" (Q.16: 89).**

Allah has conveyed all religions along this clear, passionate pattern: **"…for indeed he has brought it (this *Qur'an*) down to your heart by Allah's permission, confirming what came before it and [as] guidance and glad tidings for the believers" (Q. 2: 97).**

The ease and compassion that the *Sharī'ah* encompasses is needed by people just as one who is ill needs medication, or as the downtrodden require mercy. The compassion, solace and blessing that are particularized by the general nature of prophethood are explained by Allah: **"And We have sent you (O Muhammad) not but as a mercy for all creation" (Q. 21: 107).**

Allah explains the major objectives of the *Qur'an* and the resultant bliss of those that pursue them: **"And We send down from the *Qur'an* that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe and it increases the wrongdoers nothing but loss" (Q. 17: 82).**

No Blind Imitation (*Taqlīd*)

Islam has elevated humanist objectives, some of which we will point out here. The liberation of the intellect is the foundation of respectable faith and acceptable belief. Very few people are

endowed with free minds, constantly in motion, unburdened by inherited errors. Consider fast trains that cover great distances while their passengers remain seated in their compartments not taking a single step. Blind imitation (*taqlīd*) is like this; it transports its followers to opinions and teachings that they would not have embraced had they not been born with them. Blind imitation travels great distances with its followers, whether they are conscious or in a stupor, until it settles with them at its intended end. In this way they excitedly re-affirm the morals and beliefs of their predecessors as if they are a result of their own intellectual endeavour or thought: **"When it is said to them: 'Follow what Allah has sent down.' They say: 'Nay! We shall follow what we found our fathers following.' Even though their fathers did not understand anything nor were they guided" (Q. 2: 170).**

Many generations were misguided by this rigidity, which serves only to fossilize the intellect and appease one's sentiments. It transforms people into dumb brutes that pay no attention when called because they are restricted by that which does not unite and repudiate that which they are ignorant of: **"And the example of those who reject faith is as that of him who shouts out to that which hears nothing but calls and cries. (They are) deaf, dumb, and blind, so they do not understand" (Q. 2: 171).**

True scholars of Islam, in contrast, find no benefit in embracing *Taqlīd*. The human intellect is obligated to explore the horizons of the heavens and the earth, searching and studying, so that it may know Allah and the world. If it fails to do so, then it is certainly negligent of its primary function. Everything borne of the liberated intellect, whether plausible or not within easy reach, every means that leads to the liberation of the intellect, whether difficult or docile, is of the foundations of Islam and of its objectives. The novice reader might be surprised to realise that the prevalent axiom of Islamic Jurisprudence is that "the intellect *('aql*) is the basis for tradition (*naql*) (whose sources are the *Qur'an* and authentic *aḥadīth* (Prophetic Traditions))" and that the teachings constructed by revelation stand upon the foundation of plain reason and sound thinking.

The Sublimity of Islam

Islam strives to bring about the reformation of the self and the creation of a refined conscience that is motivated by God-Consciousness (*taqwa*), both in private and openly. The venting of personal biases that are concealed within one's heart cannot be prevented by any action whatsoever and some manifestations of human behaviour cannot be controlled. It is thus futile to confront visible action, attempting to formulate it in a specific mould, or to force upon these

actions limited boundaries while neglecting their sources and ulterior motives. For this reason the Prophet (SAW) said: **"God-Consciousness is here, God-Consciousness is here, God-Consciousness is here,"** pointing to his chest.[103]

The truth is that it is impossible to establish an uprighteous civilization if it is based upon hearts that are ill. That which cannot uphold the conscience or purify intentions will not subdue the unruliness and excesses of humankind. Humankind's make-up is layered with physical and hidden drives that, when they manifest themselves, act as fuel for exhausting endeavours in life. Even though these drives may be concealed or controlled, they sprinkle upon life a carelessness that warrants removal. **"And how many a town (population) have We destroyed, which were thankless for its means of livelihood! And those are their dwellings which have not been inhabited after them except a little. And verily, We have been the inheritors" (Q. 28: 58).**

It is no wonder, therefore, that Islam encompasses a detailed body of beliefs (*'Aqā'id*), rituals of worship (*'Ibādāt*), Laws (*Aḥkām*), and ethics (*Ādāb*) that subdue this evil and transform this vehemence into that which is far more earnest. The *Qur'an* and Prophetic Tradition (*Sunnah*) contain thousands of guidelines for attaining this noble objective. The spirit is definitely in need of foundational and definitive depictions that are synonymous with Allah's religion.

In my opinion, nothing rivals (or even equates) Islamic education (with the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* as its sources) in instilling nobility and terminating lowliness and depravity. In fact, as a result of this education, the Islamic nation remained for centuries the closest to civility, collaboration and mutual love, even though the politics of governance in its communities may have become unsettled and disturbing. To the neutral researcher, a comparison between common Muslims and the communities of Jews and Christians during the Middle Ages clearly demonstrates the positive effect of Islam in impressing upon its followers the characteristics of guidance, God-Consciousness and courtesy; characteristics that no other influence comes close to instilling within its followers. When the Muslims were defeated by the Crusaders of the Middle Ages due to the material and intellectual weakness of the Muslims, they were still far more outstanding than their opponents as far as conduct was concerned. In the words of a western writer: "The Crusaders committed atrocious crimes and acts, causing the world around them to tremble in fear and horror. They would kill children in the arms of their mothers and then throw their severed limbs in the air. These onslaughts brought together not only fanatics that believed in the sanctity

[103] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Virtue and Ties, ḥadīth no. 4650.

of their cause, but also individuals engrossed in immorality, forgetting The Holy Land, going along and participating in riotous demonstrations, from disgracing their opponents to plunder and murder. These atrocities left behind the scandalous traces of their actions wherever they went."

Muslims, on the other hand, did not lose their judiciousness in the face of these repulsive events, but remained of an elevated character, described by another western writer as follows: "Many of the Christians that left Jerusalem after its conquest by Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn, travelled to Antioch. The leader of the Crusaders there, Bohemond, not only refused to shelter them but went on to plunder their wealth as well. In contrast, these afflicted people were met with honour and compassion in whatever parts of the Muslim land they treaded upon."[104] This contrast shows one the level of spiritual development imprinted upon Muslims that made them, while in the worst of conditions, tread along the path of honour and God-Consciousness.

Overwhelming the self by depravity exposes it to a dangerous pitfall, advancing it and all that are linked to it to a bleak destiny. As Rousseau recalls in *Emile*: "I have always observed that young men, corrupted in early youth and addicted to women and debauchery, are inhuman and cruel; their passionate temperament makes them impatient, vindictive, and angry; their imagination fixed on one object only, refuses all others; mercy and pity are alike unknown to them; they would have sacrificed father, mother, the whole world, to the least of their pleasures."[105] Rousseau's statement is a truthful description of those that forget Allah and renounce their religion, becoming tainted by the darkness of disbelief and anarchy. **"No! But on their hearts is the covering (of sins and evil deeds) which they used to earn. No! Surely they (evildoers) will be veiled from seeing their Lord that Day. Then, verily they will indeed enter and taste the burning flame of Hell" (Q. 83: 14-16).**

To the level of which human beings are deprived of the truth, so too are they deprived of elements of faith. To the level of which they lack reverence for Allah, so too are they inclined to vain desires and jesting with things of honour, even if they may affiliate to one of the divinely ordained religions. The capacity that Islam places in the hearts of the believers has left within them a great inherited legacy, safeguarding them against contemptibility and assisting them to shun evil. It saddens us, however, to admit that the Muslims of the last century have lost a lot of

[104] From the article *Towards a Muslim Generation*.
[105] Jean-Jacques Rousseau (2008), *Emile* (Bibliobazaar), p. 251.

the characteristics of genuine religious devotion and spiritual wholeness that Muslims enjoyed in the past, which has gradually begun to fade away.

The Recompense is a Reality

One of the goals of Islam is to reinforce the idea of the Hereafter, recognizing it as a reality beyond any doubt. Preparing for one's transition to the afterlife is a sign of guidance and evidence of sound judgement. Inhabitants of Cairo are aware that there is a country out there called America, which one is able to travel to when given the opportunity. Similarly, one should be aware that there is another world out there, which we will be going to without a doubt, where one will live for eternity. Humankind is so preoccupied with its present state that it does not consider that which is beyond. Its attention is so deeply devoted to the seen-world that it almost renounces the unseen-world. Even though it sees death transgressing upon life by the hour, wearing away its good fortune and encroaching upon its flow, it remains deluded and oblivious.

In this regard, al-Ḥasan said: "I have not seen a truth more resembling of falsehood than death." It is no wonder that Islam continuously portrays images of Paradise and Hell in the hereafter, with elaborate descriptions, so that every living being may feel that his firmly established future is not upon the face of this earth. Even so, it is absurd to regard the reality of the Hereafter as an exhortation to bear the oppressions of tyranny in tranquillity and inactivity. Islam, with its detailed description of the joys of Paradise and the pain of Hell, makes clear that death in the struggle against tyrants is the shortest route to the highest garden of Paradise and that tolerating the disgrace of oppression causes one to slip towards the Hell-fire, the worst of abodes.

Also, the physical nature of reward and punishment is a reality and is not imaginary or metaphorical. Indeed, humankind is a creation far more magnificent than angels and devils. Their sensitivity to happiness and misery is shared by their bodies and souls equally. This applies in this world, so why should they go beyond this natural capacity in the hereafter? In the view of Islam, human beings are a creation fashioned from an essence and a physical matrix that is not separated. There is no room for dividing our nature into matter that has no connection with the soul, or a soul having no connection with matter. The efforts of philosophy in this realm do not concern us, nor do they exert any influence in matters of religion. There are youths who hush down the voices of desire within them if these voices draw them to what is forbidden, opening their ears to whispers of faith that urge purity and virtuousness. Is it not fair that they attain complete compensation as a reward, or a compensation that profits from this abstinence? Why do

some look down upon the worth of such compensation, which entices these youths to practice chastity (along with many other incentives) when the following has been revealed in this regard: **"And (there will be) fair females with wide, lovely eyes (as wives for the pious), like unto preserved pearls. A reward for what they used to do. No false, vain talk will they hear therein, nor any sinful speech, but only greetings of peace" (Q. 56: 22-26).**

Indeed, the Hereafter is a reality and the destined reward in it is material as well as spiritual because humankind is composed of matter as well as spirit. Islamic society is founded upon constant preparedness for the abode in the Hereafter and obligates its adherents to order their daily lives on this basis.

Brotherhood and Equality

One of the goals of Islam is the strengthening and consolidation of bonds between different races, between the first and the last, the close and the distant, to establish a brotherhood that is not biased towards state, nor partial towards tribe, nor renouncing of colour; a brotherhood that ignores all lineages except the lineage of Adam and rejects all preferences except the preference of ability and integrity; which looks at all servants of Allah heeding only their behaviour and talents, paying no attention at all to the differences in faces or languages or origins; a brotherhood that prompted the Prophet (SAW) to say to his people: "**If you are commanded by a maimed, black slave that leads you with Allah's Book, then listen and obey."**[106]

This brotherhood, inculcated by Islam and spread amongst its people, has no equivalent anywhere in the world. Yes, the maligning of ancestry and slandering of lineage does occur. Is there not always someone who falls into sin? However, such maligning and slander does not affect the established principle, neither in its legislation nor in its implementation. For extended periods in Islamic History, even "slaves" were able to be kings, accumulating everything they desired but managing, in the shade of brotherhood, to maintain equality between all types of people and to establish states united in solidarity and authority.

Look at al-Mutanabbi, the arrogant Arab Poet, abandoning the court of Sayf ad-Dawlah in the Levant, going to Kāfūr, the ruler of Egypt, asking for his assistance and praising him in verse:

> Those who ask Kāfūr are free of need from any other
> Just as one at the ocean has no need for a water-carrier.

[106] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Leadership, ḥadīth no. 3422.

Kāfūr realized that the Poet had high expectations, but did not entrust him with the governance of a principality or even a village. He, instead, sufficed by rewarding him with ordinary gifts. Al-Mutanabbi responded by urging him to show more generosity:

Father of Musk, is there in a cup
any honour that I may attain;
for I am in need,
while you are still drinking

Kāfūr refused to respond to the ambitions of the Poet, who came to him singing praises of wealth and honour. For this, al-Mutanabbi slanders him:

Who taught this castrated Negro how to pay rewards,
His white fathers or His black forefathers?
Never buy a slave without buying a whip as well
for indeed slaves are unfortunate and defiled.

Al-Mutanabbi's response is the curse of a strained man, a rejected beggar, and does not reflect the traditions of a nation or the politics of a state. Before this period and after, loyalists were able to ascend to the highest positions without being restricted by colour, lineage or nationality.

It is frightening and humiliating to relate what has taken place recently in the modern world, where western civilization has reached its climax and sent forth its ripest harvests. In his book *Color and Conscience: The Irrepressible Conflict*, Buell Gordon Gallagher notes that: "Slavery as ownership of chattel is gone: as a caste system, it remains. Its purpose is to keep nonwhites in a position that, in one way or another, is inferior or subordinate to that of whites."[107] It is painful to see how even the laws of murder were discounted by Whites when applied to their own race in cases related to Black victims. Unjust legislation and oppressive legal procedures are severe afflictions that have no authority and have not been sanctioned by Allah.[108]

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[107] Buell Gordon Gallagher (1946), *Color and Conscience: The Irrepressible Conflict* (Harper and Brothers), p. 62. The Arabic text makes reference to the secondary source that quotes Gallagher, but I have quoted and referenced the primary source [Translator].

[108] At this point in the Arabic text, Shaykh al-Ghazālī discusses racist legislation prevalent in the United States in the 1950s. This discussion has been omitted because those laws have since been repealed. However, the point he makes is still valid. Statutory racism was only abolished in South Africa in 1994 with the collapse of Apartheid, but has still not been completely purged in other countries; Israeli legislation still upholds the racist "Law of Return" which allows automatic citizenship to Jews from any

There is a vast difference between the wretched slaves of modern civilization and their predecessors, who attained honour in the Land of Islam and were not afflicted, with the passing of time, with some of the afflictions of their Black brothers at the hands of Whites in the modern world.

Equality between all categories of people in the light of sincere brotherhood and the outlawing of colour differentiation, along with shared principles of unity, made the Egyptians a model for the blossoming of unity in the Nile Valley. People there are not concerned about Black or White. One even sees a White man standing in prayer behind a Black *imām*. The *imām's* knowledge and character are the only traits that qualify him to stand in the prayer niche, leading the congregation. This is a consequence of the influence of Islam and the maturation of its inherited teachings.

Punishment (*Al-Ḥudūd*)

One of the goals of Islam is the reinforcing of good and the restraining of vices in all sectors of society by training individuals to do good and to reject evil by their own initiative. Islam strongly rejects moral transgressions and the implementation of severe punishments upon perpetrators is not an innovation but is also a characteristic of earlier religions. Allah, the Glorious and Sublime, is indeed vigilant over humankind, which had prompted Him to send forth prophets with a message that dispels doubt from amongst His servants.

The harshness that characterizes the punishments for stealing and adultery are not the only means to protect honour and wealth or to induce people to respect the honour and possessions of others. The safeguarding of general rights is primarily based upon faith, worship and character. Even the harshest punishments do not seriously serve to elevate a nation whose conscience has been shaken and whose system of belief has been disturbed. Crime begins like disease, causing manifest changes to the body and activating invisible germs. Its danger then worsens until it becomes life-threatening, invoking fear in the healthy as well as the afflicted. The afflicted fear for their own lives and the healthy fear the consequences of infection. This is a result of disobedience and the continual transgression of the boundaries of Allah.

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country in the world but prohibits Palestinians displaced from their land and violently dispossessed in the *Nakba* (Catastrophe) of 1948 from returning to their homes [Translator].

Minor transgressions are not an alarming characteristic of human nature. In an immaculate society minor errors shrivel and vanish, just as pollutants vanish in an environment that enjoys good weather and rejuvenating winds. But the very same minor transgressions, in an environment that welcomes and reinforces them, devising excuses for their occurrence, transforms them into crime and insolence. Islam is strongly committed to the expulsion of wrong when it has been exposed. The lashing and capital punishment that it enforces - or threatens to enforce - is for the sake of maintaining a decent general environment in which evil does not develop from offensive traces of insanity into outright forbidden sin.

A fact that we feel free to state is that the controversy between Islam and human-made political ideologies is not based upon the principle of implementing Divinely-Ordained punishments, but rather upon other principles.

Are free sexual relationships - that arise from unrestricted interaction - forbidden? Is the animalistic intercourse between young males and females a crime that should be prohibited and should the paths that lead to it be blocked? Is drunkenness a deficiency that lowers the honour of a person and makes him an outlaw, like one who abuses opium or hashish, for example? Indeed, much controversy centres on these issues. Salvation of the community from these tokens of immorality may not require the implementation of some of these frightening punishments inasmuch as Islamic Ideology requires deeming some things permissible and others forbidden.

Propagation of Grace

One of the primary goals of Islam is to correct the egocentrism with which the human being is born, to make his outlook more liberal and his conduct more uplifting so that he may understand that existence was not founded only for him and that he does not exist alone.

When a person senses his own rights he becomes aware of the rights of others and is saved from the stupidity of greed, insolence, arrogance and vanity. The Noble *Qur'an* drives one to this realization when it requires us to show benevolence to the orphan. And who knows? Perhaps we will leave progeny that will be in need of mercy and equity. Will it then please us to abandon these orphans? **"And let those (executors and guardians) have the same fear in their minds as they would have for their own, if they had left weak offspring behind. So let them be conscious of Allah and speak right words" (Q. 4: 9).**

Egocentrism is like a fire, increasing in intensity when fuel is added to it. People are intoxicated by the graces granted to them – like the fulfilment of desires and incessant wealth – and they forget Allah's rights over that which He has granted them, i.e., the portion of their wealth reserved for His less fortunate servants, dispensed by *Zakāh* (almsgiving). This intoxicating egocentrism causes them to refuse others, resulting in degeneration on this earth and the severing of close links with people.

The Prophet (SAW) warned against this infested breeding ground, saying: **"Indeed, that which I fear most for your sake is that which Allah brings forth for you of the blessings of the earth."** When asked what the blessings of the earth were, he said: **"The wealth of this world."** A man then asked him: "Does good come with evil?" The Prophet (SAW) remained silent for a long time, until it was thought that revelation was descending upon him. He then wiped his brow and asked: **"Where is the questioner?"** "Here", he replied. The Prophet (SAW) said: **"It does not come except with good! Indeed, this wealth is a beautiful meadow. Indeed, everything that grows in spring shrivels out unsuccessfully or is harvested, except that which is consumed of the meadow. It is eaten by livestock who then ruminate on it and finally excrete it. It thus returns to fertilize and is once again consumed. Verily this wealth is a beautiful meadow. He who partakes of it justly and spends of it justly is the best of those who are righteous. And he who partakes of it unjustly is like one who eats and is not satisfied."**[109]

Amongst the grazing livestock are animals that are lured by the moist spring-meadow - their insides having shrivelled in the dry season - and approach it like desirous gluttons. It is their ignorant nature that causes them to over-indulge upon this easy food-source, eating, devouring, seeking more, and accumulating. They proceed in this way, filling their stomachs until nothing remains in front of them. How many creatures destroy themselves simply because they have food close at hand? How many people are astounded by the wealth of this world, their eyes and hearts enchanted by it, their hands stretched forth towards it, whetting their appetites, accumulating it until they have more than enough? But their egocentrism presses them to accumulate more, until they finally meet the fate of the over-indulgent creatures and are destroyed. To be satiated by the world in this foolish manner is indeed a manifest loss. The hoarding of wealth is like holding food in the stomach: any surplus that is suppressed for too long changes into a lethal poison. This prophetic parable exemplifies a moderate lifestyle.

[109] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Upliftment, ḥadīth no. 5947.

Consider livestock that maintain moderation in their grazing, ruminating what they eat and eliminating whatever remains from their bodies, as opposed to animals that reach the butcher, fattened by their own gluttony. The butcher benefits from their meat because it has become impractical to derive benefit from their existence. Do you not see that this wealth was confiscated because its owner held it back? Because of their clinging to their wealth it was taken away from them and given not to one complaining of indigestion but rather to one complaining of starvation. This is how one who is lured by the wealth of this world is treated; his excess wealth is confiscated while he still retains superfluity of speech. The principle established by the Prophet (SAW) is thus: **"Indeed this wealth is a beautiful pasture; he who indulges in it justly is blessed by it; and the one who hordes it, taking whatever pleases him of Allah's and His Prophet's wealth, will only partake of the fire on the Day of Retribution."**[110]

The formidable campaign that Islam wages against stinginess, hard-heartedness and greed has no rival in any other philosophy. Plain generosity thus becomes a trait of Muslims, which Allah alludes to as follows: **"Those who spend their wealth (in Allah's cause) by night and day, in secret and in public, they shall have their reward with their Lord. On them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve" (Q. 2: 274).**

In the darkest of times, this trait fulfilled its merciful function, healing the wounded and softening calamity and harm, doing for the masses what in our time not even general or National Socialism can achieve.

What do people imagine when considering the Mamluk Era in Egypt? What do they say when they compare the level of social welfare services in this era with that in England or in Russia? For the sake of historical record we invite responses to this inquiry, demonstrated in the *Qalāwūn Hospital Endowment Document*, which states: "This mental hospital was established for the treatment of sick Muslims - male and female, rich or poor - in Cairo and its precincts, those resident and newcomers, for people of all nationalities, for the treatment of all sicknesses and afflictions. Young and old may enter, alone or in groups. Poverty-stricken patients, male and female, may stay for the period of their treatment and spend only that which is intended for their treatment. The only differentiation that will be made is between those coming from afar and those living nearby and between those resident and those who are not, without any stipulations being imposed for any form of compensation.

[110] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Upliftment, ḥadīth no. 5947.

"The administrator of this endowment will spend of its proceeds according to the needs of the patients, fulfilling their bedding needs, seeing to it that every patient's needs are fulfilled according to his condition and the requirements of his illness. He will deal justly with all of them, in obedience and heedfulness to Allah. He will exert all his efforts to fulfil their needs as they are his subjects and every administrator is responsible for his subjects. The hospital's kitchen will undertake to prepare both chicken and meat for the patients. Every patient will be served in his own platter, not sharing it with another; his food will also be brought to him covered. Every patient's nutritional needs will be fulfilled in this way for all meals, morning and evening.

"The administrator will also spend of the proceeds of this endowment for the remuneration of the Muslim doctors that attend to the patients, whether on a rotational basis or together. The doctors will monitor the patients' conditions and write down their nutritional requirements, etc. in a file. The doctors will also remain resident at the hospital, whether on a rotational basis or together, every night. They are also expected to undertake the treatment of their patients with kindness and consideration.

"If someone is sick in his home, then the administrator may spend upon the patient's needs, for medicine and food, etc., taking into consideration the availability of funds, etc.…"

The *Qalāwūn Hospital Endowment Document*, permeated with the Islamic Spirit, was written seven centuries ago. At this time, Europe was a continent that knew only the law of "survival of the fittest". Have the most developed Socialist parties presented a system more refined and more charitable than this one for the ill and calamity-stricken?

This is the secret behind why Muslims find their religion completely sufficient, and why they turn away from other ideologies. In my opinion, the disappearance of an Islamic orientation in the West is the only reason why Leftist inclinations and principles have flourished and spread.

Jihād

One of the goals of Islam is to combat dictatorial regimes and misdirected sedition until freedom of conscience and intellect is firmly established on earth, so that no truth may be degraded and no belief neglected. This is genuine Jihād. Jihād is a deterrent against terrorism, remedying its ferocious might and eradicating its authority. The use of force for tyranny and aggression is

terrorism. The seizing of this force to ensure the safety of people, to implement justice, and allay fear, is Jihād. Colonialist attacks upon the lands of the East for the sake of plunder and the enslavement of its people is terrorism. Fighting against such attacks with whatever may come to hand is Jihād.

Productive Jihād converts sound scientific theories and individual methods into established realities, general practices and systematic programs. It creates a generation that embraces an idea, so that it may be exploited by coming generations.

As such, Islam gives tremendous importance to Jihād because of the great desired benefit derived from it and because of the wide circle it creates for the establishment of truth. Without a doubt, one who heads out for Jihād receives a greater reward from Allah than one who dedicates himself to his individual obligations, even if he had to spend his entire life fasting by day and worshipping by night. Ahmad narrates that the Prophet (SAW) said: **"Every nation has its form of asceticism, and for this nation it is Jihād in the path of Allah."**[111]

It is also narrated that a man came to Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī, asking for advice. He replied: "I had asked Allah's Messenger the same question before you. I advise you to be heedful of Allah because it is the pinnacle of everything, and also to go out in Jihād, as it is the asceticism of Islam. Also remember Allah and read the *Qur'an* as it is a remembrance for you in the Hereafter and a light for you in this world."[112]

The state which Islam establishes bears no link with oppression upon earth and has no place for singing the praises of personalities or for the realization of vain desires. It is a means for the attainment of some of the objectives we have just mentioned, the rest of which we have explained in some of our other works.

The *Qur'an* and then the *Sunnah* (Prophetic Tradition)

The primary source for the study of Islam is the Noble *Qur'an*. The position of the *Qur'an* in relation to the other sources is comparable to the roots of a tree in relation to its branches and

[111] *Musnad Aḥmad*, ḥadīth no.13306.
[112] *Musnad Aḥmad*, ḥadīth no. 11349.

fruit. As is stated in a *ḥadīth*: **"The superiority of Allah's words over all other words is like the superiority of Allah over His creation."**[113]

In the general administration of any organization, fundamental constitutions make up the foundation; then comes administrative, criminal, personal, and business laws; then bulletins and resolutions, and explanatory notes, etc. Constitutions are required to group together critical principles of legislation, administration and implementation, to encompass issues that have to be recorded, leaving no room for contrasting hypotheses. Issues that are not addressed in the constitution will be addressed by drawing on the constitutional sanctity and therefore cannot possibly contradict it in word or in spirit. If this disparity does arise, then it is automatically nullified.

And, so too is Allah's book. It is the central pivot of Islam, the source of its laws, the constitution that prioritizes Islamic ethics, orientation, advice, and legislation. Included in it are the foundational principles of Islam, and it portrays a general picture of that which pleases Allah as far as His servants are concerned, in matters of their livelihood, orientation of their thoughts and behavioural characteristics. Unfortunately, Muslims do not show enough esteem for the Noble Book. They do not attach their sights or their perception to its meanings and goals as is required. Great attention should not be paid to its melodious recitation or to the temporary effect one sees upon some individuals as a result; neither points to anything of great significance.

The *Qur'an* is indeed the primary source of guidance for humankind. The guidance sent forth from Allah embodies calculated principles of truth and guarantees for success. The verses of the *Qur'an* are like milestones leading to the Straight Path, just as the horizons of the cosmos point to the secrets of knowledge and the repositories of power and creation. If humankind were only to realize this, they would stop in front of every chapter, in fact every letter, seeking certainty and ascertaining how to strengthen their links with the Lord of all creation. Indeed, the Word of Allah is above all words. It is thus obligatory to receive the *Qur'an* with hospitable awareness, seriousness, and a spirit of inquiry. The *Qur'an* undoubtedly carries the greatest of benefits for humankind and one is therefore astonished by people who grant preference to other laws, holding them above the laws and words of Allah: **"Allah! None has the right to be worshipped but He.**

[113] *Al-Ibānah al-Kubra,* Ibn Baṭṭah, Chapter on what was Conveyed on the Sunnah from the Prophet (SAW), no. 203.

Surely, He will gather you together on the Day of Resurrection about which there is no doubt. And who is truer in statement than Allah?" (Q. 4: 87).

One of the signs of sincere belief in Allah is devotion to reflecting upon His Book, seeking from it benefits that are indispensable, and extracting its wholesome fruits for the short and long term. It is impossible for one who believes in the Noble *Qur'an* to give credence to some other proof over the *Qur'an* or to equate some outside orientation to its guidance. The *Qur'an* overrides all else and is never overridden; it stands in judgement over all other proofs and is not judged by any outside criterion; this would be alien to the religion of Allah.

The relationship of the *Sunnah* (Prophetic Tradition), *Qiyās* (Analogy), *Istiṣlāḥ* (Convention), etc. to the *Qur'an* is comparable to the relationship of branches to roots or members of a group to the leader. The Prophet (SAW) conveys from Allah, making clear that which He has desired, completing the finer details of the legislation, the portions which a general constitution does not usually delve into. The *Qur'an*, for example, discusses business transactions - the most common of transactions - mentioning only a small number of laws, not exceeding the number of fingers on the hand. The *Sunnah*, in contrast, contains hundreds of *aḥādīth* (prophetic sayings) explaining further and going into extensive detail. The *Sunnah* - in addition to this legislative framework - covers a very wide field and we are required to reflect lengthily upon it as well.

Let us suppose that an organization were to appear before us with a clear system of order contained in a specific book, and it wanted to popularize itself and strove to control the politics of its society. What would it do? It would, in all probability, issue a newspaper to express its status and establish it as a platform for promoting its opinions, using it to attract the masses. This newspaper, speaking on behalf of the organization and expressing its official opinions and viewpoints, without a doubt, occupies an important position. Every now and then, that which it circulates draws criticism to the organization as it is regarded as an in-depth exposition of the organization's position.

The function of the official newspaper of an organization is to portray its judgements on current incidents, to exploit opportunities, to recommend its programs and to commend its reforms. It illustrates - in accordance with the times and the people - the principles that it projects. It may address a student in a manner different from a worker, or it may take a foreigner to task on issues that it would not address a citizen on. Some people may understand the organization incorrectly,

so it would elaborate by explaining its position, thereby refuting the notions contradicting it, thus defending its position. This change and explanation follows the change in conditions and people; the requirements of different circumstances call for suitable guidelines. There is no place for sowing dissension by claiming variance or contradiction between the positions of the organization and what is circulated in its official newspaper.

This is - by way of an exaggeration in expression - the function of the *Sunnah* in relation to the *Qur'an*. The Prophet (SAW) spent 23 years speaking to his community, his conduct made manifest to friends and opponents alike, just as his perseverance in his function of guiding humankind was known to all. It is not important to only know what he said, but how, when, and to whom. All these factors assist us tremendously in understanding the *Sunnah* correctly.

Examples of the Principle

Ibn ʻAbbās (RA) narrates that a man came to the Prophet (SAW) and said: "O Messenger of Allah, which action is most loved by Allah?" The Prophet (SAW) replied: **"The present and the departing."** He said: "And what are the present and the departing?" The Prophet (SAW) replied: **"The one who recites the *Qur'an* from beginning to end. Every time he stops, he departs [i.e. resumes recitation]."**[114]

ʻAbdallah Ibn Masʻūd (RA) narrates: "I asked the Prophet (SAW) which action is most loved by Allah? He said: '**The prayer at its appointed time.'** I then said, 'then which (action)?' He said: **'Obedience to one's parents.'** I then said, 'then which?' He said: **'Jihād in the path of Allah.'"** Ibn Masʻūd then said: "He spoke to me about these actions and if I had continued to ask him, he would have continued answering."[115]

Abū Hurayrah (RA) relates that Abū Dharr (RA) asked the Messenger of Allah (SAW): "Which is the best action?" He replied: **"Belief in Allah and His Messenger."** It was then asked: "And what after?" He said: **"Jihād in the path of Allah."** It was then asked: "And what after?" He said: **"The Ḥaj (Pilgrimage) correctly performed."**[116]

[114] *Sunan at-Tirmidhī,* Book of Recitations, ḥadīth no. 2872.
[115] *Sunan at-Tirmidhī,* Book of Virtues and Ties, ḥadīth no. 1820.
[116] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Faith, ḥadīth no. 25.

Abū Mūsa al-Ash'arī (RA) narrates that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) was asked which act of Islam was the best. He said: **"He who safeguards Muslims from his tongue and hand."**[117]

'Abdallah ibn 'Umar (RA) relates that a man asked the Messenger of Allah (SAW) which aspect of Islam was the best. He replied: **"To share your food with and to greet with the salutation of peace someone that you know and someone that you do not know."**[118]

What is significant about there being these various answers to the same question? It indicates that the pronouncements of the Messenger of Allah (SAW) addressed the conditions of the people he was speaking to, and he therefore stressed aspects of worship or behaviour that he deemed most suitable for the individual, or what he considered to be their most pressing need. He remained silent on other aspects, not out of neglect but because the *Qur'an* itself or other traditions carried the burden of explaining them.

Furthermore, those who benefited from these answers were in no way to regard any one *ḥadīth* as the entire faith. It is also a mistake to be ignorant of the circumstances in which the *ḥadīth* was recalled as this context throws tremendous light upon its intent. Just as attention is paid to the conditions of the one being addressed in any of the traditions, so too are the general conditions of the group also considered. For example, when the disbelievers crave for our lands, occupying them with their savagery, Jihād - in these circumstances - is better than the pilgrimage. In the face of severe crises and poverty, charity is better than the voluntary prayer. When the shortcomings of our community in the fields of crafts and industry become apparent, preoccupation with chemistry and steel-works is more liked by Allah than ploughing the earth and tending to goats. Understanding of the *Qur'an* is not complete without knowledge of the *Sunnah* and the *Sunnah* cannot be correctly understood without knowledge of the context within which the prophetic guidance was directed.

If we are not completely acquainted with the timeframes, places, and situations in which these *aḥādīth* were set, we may find that they are part of a group of other traditions whose framework is known, thus making up for this deficiency. One is faced with many narrations of varying meaning, making it difficult to giving priority in classification and arrangement, and in placing every *ḥadīth* vis-à-vis the conditions that concur with it. There are books available on "occasions

[117] *Sunan at-Tirmidhī,* Book of Faith, ḥadīth no. 2552.
[118] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Seeking Permission, ḥadīth no. 5767.

of *aḥādīth"*,[119] in the same style as "occasions of revelation" studies found in books of *Tafsīr* (Qur'anic Interpretation). These works are very important for serving the study of the *Sunnah* and to repel attacks against it.

What we have recollected concerning the understanding of the *Sunnah* and its relationship to the *Qur'an* is nothing new. This knowledge was possessed by the early scholars, which led them to the correct understanding of the realities of this religion.

The Function of the *Sunnah*

When citing from the *Qur'an* or *Sunnah* on a specific topic, I came to notice that many *aḥādīth* corresponded in intention and objective to the intentions and objectives encompassed by the *Qur'an* itself. In many instances the *ḥadīth* would reinforce the meaning of the Qur'anic verse or provide a similar meaning relating to the verse, thereby taking on the same orientation, even if it may seem to the naked eye that the relationship between the *ḥadīth* and the verse is a distant one.

The Prophet (SAW), for example, says: **"O Allah! There is none that can prevent that which You bestow, and there is none that can bestow that which You prevent."**[120] This meaning is no different from the following statement of Allah, the Most High and Honoured: **"Whatever of mercy (i.e. good) Allah may grant to Humankind, none can withhold it, and whatever He may withhold, none can grant it thereafter. And He is the All-Mighty, the Wise" (Q. 35: 2).**

Examples of this type are indeed many. For example, the Messenger (SAW) **"prohibited the use of gold and silver utensils for eating and drinking, and prohibited the wearing of silk, and to sit upon it (use it to cover chairs, etc)."**[121] This ruling enforced by the *Sunnah* is drawn from the Qur'anic prohibition of opulence and lavishness, which regards the opulent and the lavish as enemies of all reform, as opponents of all prophets, and as a factor that leads to the collapse of all nations: **"And We did not send a warner to a township, but those who were given the worldly wealth and luxuries among them said: 'We believe not in the (message) with which you have been sent'" (Q. 34: 34).**

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[119] Two such works are: *al-Bayān wa at-Ta'rīf fī Asbāb wurūd al-Ḥadīth ash-Sharīf* by as-Sayyīd Ibrāhim ibn Muhammad, better known as Ibn Ḥamza ad-Dīmashqī (d. 1110 AH), and *al-Llm' fi Asbāb al-Ḥadīth*, edited by Dr Yahya Ismā'il.

[120] *Sunan an-Nisā'ī,* Book of Awakening, ḥadīth no. 1324.

[121] *Sunan ad-Dārimī,* Book of Drinks, ḥadīth no. 2037.

The prohibition of using graveyards as places of prayer - which was enforced by the *Sunnah*[122] - is in reality a definitive protection of *Tawḥīd* (Allah's Oneness), a concept from which Christians deviated by taking as places of worship the graves of their saints; even the Meccan idolaters referred to this practice as evidence to oppose the Messenger (SAW). Allah relates that they said: **"We have not heard (the like) of this among the people of these later days. This is nothing but an invention!" (Q. 38: 7).**

The *Sunnah* takes the position of reinforcing the objectives of the *Qur'an*, whether explicit or implicit. It also explains its general aspects and clarifies its ambiguities. The *Sunnah* commands a high status in the eyes of Muslims and its position as an evidentiary source for legislation is well known. There are *Sunan* (traditions) that specify general rulings of the *Qur'an*, as in the verse: **"Allah commands you as regards your children's (inheritance); to the male, a portion equal to that of two females" (Q. 4: 11).** The *Sunnah* clarifies that a child that murders (his parents) gets no portion of inheritance.

In the verse: **"Forbidden to you (for food) are: dead animals, blood" (Q. 5: 3),** the *Sunnah* clarifies that there are two allowable categories within these prohibitions. The Prophet (SAW) said: **"Made allowable for us are two categories of dead animals and two categories of blood: Fish and locusts and liver and spleen."**

Concerning the verse in which Allah, the Most High and Honourable states: **"Cut off the hand of the thief, male and female" (Q. 5: 38)**, the *Sunnah* clarifies that not the hand of every thief is to be cut off. The hand is not cut off if the item stolen is not in excess of a specific value; it is also not cut off in the case of the hunger-stricken searching for food, or in the case of one who was robbed and then retrieves his stolen property. And if the hand is to be cut off, then it must be the right hand and at the point of the wrist-joint as is stipulated by the *Sunnah*.

The *Sunnah* is also a source of rulings that make easier some of the requirements that the Noble Book commands. For example, the *Qur'an* commands that the feet be washed when performing *wuḍū'* (ablution), regarding it as one of the pillars of *wuḍū'*. The cleaning of the feet is therefore a necessary requirement for the prayer, i.e., for it to be regarded as having been fulfilled correctly. The Messenger of Allah (SAW) however specified that if one had worn socks or leather socks after having cleaned his feet, then it was not necessary to wash the feet every time one performed

[122] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Mosques and Places of Prayer, ḥadīth no. 827.

the *wuḍū'*. It is sufficient to just wipe the top of the foot, over the sock or shoe, as an indication of the pillar of *wuḍū'* that has been exempted.[123]

Whatever the Messenger (SAW) constituted and commanded is not an act of vain desire or a subjective inclination on his part: **"Your companion (Muhammad) has neither gone astray nor has he erred. Nor does he speak of (his own) desire" (Q. 53: 2-3)**. It is Allah's directive to him, a directive that conforms to the primary principle of Islam: tolerance and ease, as long as it does not contradict the teachings of the *Qur'an*. We are thus able to say that there is no *Sunnah* that contradicts any Qur'anic ruling; it is in fact impossible to find a *ḥadīth* that contradicts a specific Qur'anic ruling or its general principles for that matter.

Any single *ḥadīth* cannot simply be chosen for the sake of drawing evidence. We are required to choose several *aḥādīth* that have been narrated concerning a topic, and then to add the corresponding verses of the Noble Book, never ignoring this connection. Simply to draw conclusions randomly using any *ḥadīth* that may be in sight, ignoring the circumstances under which it was narrated and the extent of its application, would be no less than misguidance. Muslims suffered the consequences of such misguidance in the past and are experiencing its harm in the present as well. I will now present a series of *aḥādīth*, arranged chronologically, so that the reader may be able to picture the blunders that a Muslim might commit if he were to isolate the first *ḥadīth*, or any of them from the series, intending to implement it while ignoring the others:

1. **"Whosoever bears testimony that there is none worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger, Allah makes it forbidden for him (to enter) the Fire."[124]**

2. **"Three (things) dismantle Islam and the principles of the religion. Islam is based upon these three, and whosoever leaves one of them has committed disbelief, making the spilling of his blood allowable. These are: bearing testimony that there is none worthy of worship except Allah, the prescribed prayers and fasting in the month of Ramaḍān."[125]**

3. **"I swear by three things - that Allah will not make one who has a share in Islam like one who has no share in it - and the parts of Islam are three: the prayer, fasting, and *zakāh* (alms-giving)."[126]**

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[123] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Purification, ḥadīth no. 414.
[124] *Sunan at-Tirmidhī,* Book of Faith, ḥadīth no. 2562.
[125] *Muṣannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah*, The Ideal of the Believer, vol. no.7, no. 69.
[126] *Musnad Aḥmad*, ḥadīth no. 23968.

4. **"Islam is founded upon five things: bearing testimony that none is worthy of worship except Allah, performing of the prayer, giving *zakāh* (alms), the pilgrimage and fasting in the month of Ramaḍān."**[127]

5. **"And by He in whose Hands is my soul, there is no slave that performs three things: the five obligatory prayers, fasting in the month of Ramaḍān and abstaining from the seven major sins, that shall not find the doors of Paradise open for him."**[128]

6. **"Islam consists of eight parts: belief is a part, the prayer is a part, *zakāh* (alms-giving) is a part, fasting is a part, the pilgrimage is a part, enjoining what is good is a part, forbidding what is evil is a part, *Jihād* in Allah's path is a part. He who has none of these parts has attained failure."**[129]

It is self-evident that the first *ḥadīth* was uttered before the implementation of the obligatory acts, the second before the legislation of *zakāh* (alms-giving), and the third before the obligation of the *Ḥaj* (pilgrimage).

In this way, the *Sunnah* serves the objectives which the *Qur'an* makes clear. It is the *Qur'an* alone which occupies the primary position in portraying the realities of the religion completely and in enumerating its established principles under various conditions and timeframes.

It is also self-evident that the first *ḥadīth* cannot be refuted by any of the other *aḥādīth* and that it cannot refute verses of the *Qur'an* in any aspect of legislation. This should be known by those whose minds are not at ease as far as understanding Islam is concerned and who think that the reason for this is contradiction within the texts. In reality, it is only due to the ignorance that fills their heads. The earlier scholars of Islam - the honoured *Imāms* (founders of the various jurisprudential schools) - possessed unerring theories in methods of deduction, in addition to their magnificent understanding of the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. Anyone who follows the history of Islamic legislation in its Golden Era knows this. We have only explained a small portion of what they had resolved.

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[127] *Sunan at-Tirmidhī,* Book of Faith, ḥadīth no. 2534.
[128] *Sunan an-Nisā'ī,* Book of Alms, ḥadīth no. 2395.
[129] *Muṣannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah*, On what is Related Concerning Faith and Islam, vol. no.7, no. 5.

The Validity of the *Sunnah*

If it is correctly proven that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) had commanded or forbidden something then obedience to his command is obligatory and it is likened to obedience to Allah. A Believer is not allowed to overstep the commands of the Messenger (SAW) in any ruling: **"He who obeys the Messenger (Muhammad), has indeed obeyed Allah" (Q. 4: 80).**

"It is not for a believer, man or woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter, that they should have any option in their decision. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger has indeed strayed in plain error" (Q. 33: 36).

Muslims are in full agreement concerning the position of the *Sunnah* and regard it as the second source of Islam after the Noble *Qur'an*. The *Sunan* (narrated traditions) vary in authenticity and intent. But this is not the place for this discussion. Sound intellectual criteria have been established for this purpose, and one can refer to this body of knowledge if required. The observant critic is required to discuss any *ḥadīth* from two perspectives - its *matn* (body, content, or text) and its *sanad* (chain of narrators). He may only refute a *ḥadīth* on the basis of established academic considerations. The technical sphere for this subject is very well articulated, and earlier scholars have delved into it in tremendous detail, leaving behind an enormous legacy.

Unfortunately some short-sighted individuals - who have no foothold in the field of Islamic knowledge - attack the *Sunnah* with their foolishness and reject it altogether. Some individuals hastily reject any *ḥadīth* that is related to them simply because it does not impress them or because they do not understand it. To reject the *Sunnah* in protest that the *Qur'an* encompasses everything is an innovation of immense danger. Allah, the Honoured and the Most High, had left the responsibility of presenting and clarifying the practical traditions to the Messenger (SAW). This has been verified unanimously, just like the unanimous verification of the *Qur'an*, so how can one possibly reject it. In fact, how can one reject the *Sunnah* and accept the *Qur'an* in the same breath? Indeed, rejection of the unanimously declared practical traditions (*As-Sunan al-Mutawātirah*) places one outside the fold of Islam. Rejection - simply based on vain desire - of the singularly-narrated traditions (*As-Sunan al-Āḥād*) is a transgression of fearful ramifications. We are obligated to study the *Sunnah* very carefully and to seek benefit from its rulings, ethics, and advice. Inclination towards its rejection is both unjust and unreasonable.

I have closely followed a group of those who reject the *Sunnah* and have not found in any of their views anything that warrants intellectual respect. They say: "The predecessors gave importance to the chain of narrators and confined their efforts to measuring the worth of these narrators. They did not place emphasis upon the text itself or exert any notable effort in examining the text." This is incorrect, as emphasizing the chain of narrators is not a self-serving purpose; the intention behind it is, in fact, to judge the text itself. Also, the authentication of *aḥādīth* is not based upon the uprighteousness of its narrators only; how they harmonize with the clearly-established facts of the religion is also a factor which is considered. Any unnatural irregularity or dubious intent contained therein qualifies them for exclusion from the framework of authentic *aḥādīth*. It is not permitted to make vain accusations of falsity towards any *ḥadīth*, especially if it has an authentic chain of narrators. This can only be done by submission to respected technical principles. These were the criteria that the earlier scholars imposed upon themselves and which we regard as absolutely necessary to adhere to.

Some in this group mention the *ḥadīth*: **"The Black Seed is a healing for all diseases except poisoning."**[130] One might say that practical reality gives us reason to reject this *ḥadīth*, even if al-Bukhārī regards it as authentic. It becomes apparent that the understanding of **"all diseases"** is what is problematic to people. This is an unfounded understanding because if this was the intention of the Messenger (SAW), there would be no place for all the other *aḥādīth* that describe cures for various afflictions. In reality, **"all diseases"** only implies some fever-invoking sicknesses. This is similar to the verse in the Noble *Qur'an* which describes the wind that was sent to the people of ʻĀd as **"destroying everything by the command of its Lord" (Q. 46: 25). "Everything"** in this context is limited to only the dwellings of this transgressing tribe. If a Muslim had to die unaware of this *ḥadīth*, it would not reduce his faith by even an atom's weight.

Indeed, both Abū Bakr and ʻUmar were unaware of the following authentic *ḥadīth*, where the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: **"I have been commanded to fight against the people - i.e. idolaters of the Arabian Peninsula - until they bear testimony that there is none worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, and that they establish the prayer and give alms. If they do that then their wealth and blood are safeguarded from me, except with regards to the laws of Islam; and (after this) their reckoning is upon Allah."**[131]

[130] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Medicine, ḥadīth no. 5256.
[131] *Musnad Aḥmad*, ḥadīth no.21106.

The *ḥadīth* which ‘Umar and Abū Bakr had memorized did not contain **“establish the prayer and give alms.”** If ‘Umar had been aware of this additional statement he would not have protested against Abū Bakr for fighting against those who refused to give alms. And if Abū Bakr had been aware of this addition he would not have deduced his position by analogy and citation from the *Qur’an*. However, their understanding of the Noble Book and their sound deductions from the *Sunnah* was more than sufficient and they were thus not disadvantaged in any way by not knowing certain narrations.

But to slander, in such random fashion, the *asnād* (chains of narration) and *mūtūn* (texts) of *aḥādīth,* as some people do, does not serve to outlaw any specific *ḥadīth* but rather acts to outlaw the entire *Sunnah* and places the rulings derived from it in a position of contempt and suspicion. This, as well as being a denial of plain facts, exposes the whole of Islam to alienation. The recorded collections of the *Sunnah* are historical documents of the most accurate nature known to this world. We are even able to say that the historical value of certain sacred books of other communities have been increased because they include accounts recorded by our scholars, these scholars having judged some of these works as weak and others as fabricated.

The *Sunnah* encompasses many rulings because of the tremendous accumulation of detail. Rulings are but shackles that are placed upon the behaviour of people. A shackle has to be placed in a suitable place, to which it conforms, so that there is no reason for complaint or repudiation. Complaints will only arise through misuse of these shackles because - in this instance - it serves to shut doors that should be open, to narrow boundaries that should be wider, and to impede movements that should be allowed to go in stride, without any harm. The greatest harm done to the *Sunnah* is when a specific *ḥadīth* that was intended for implementation in a specific framework has its context distorted by short-sighted people who generalize it.

Perhaps a fear of exposing Islam to foolish understandings of the *Sunnah* best describes what al-Ḥārith al-A‘war conveys in the following narration. He said: “I went to the masjid, and noticed that people were speculating about *aḥādīth* (Prophetic sayings). So I went to ‘Ali (RA) and said to him: ‘O Leader of the Believers, do you not notice how the people speculate upon *aḥādīth*?’ He said: ‘Is that what they are doing?’ I replied: ‘Yes.’ He then said: ‘I had heard the Messenger of Allah saying: **“Indeed, there will be turmoil!”**, so I asked: “What is the solution to it, O Messenger of Allah?” He said: **“Allah’s Book! In it is news of what was before you and news**

of what will be after you, and judgement for that which occurs amongst you; it is a resolution and not a thing of jest. The tyrant that turns away from it is destroyed by Allah, he who seeks guidance in anything other than it is misled by Allah; it is Allah's firm rope and (a guide to) the Straight Path. It is that which cannot be deviated by vanity nor obscured by tongues; scholars never grow weary of it nor is it worn out by attempts to refute it and its wonders are unending. It is that which even the jinn could not abstain from upon hearing it and they thus said: 'Verily! We have heard a wonderful recital (this *Qur'an*)! It guides to the Right Path' (Q. 72: 1-2). He who quotes it speaks the truth, and he who acts upon it is rewarded, and he who judges by it is always just, and he who invites to it guides to the Straight Path." Cling to it (the *Qur'an*) O A'war.'"[132]

Scholars of *ḥadīth* regard the narrations of al-Ḥārith al-A'war as weak, but the text of this *ḥadīth* encompasses very valuable truths. It must also be noted that 'Ali (RA) is not rejecting the *Sunnah*; knowing that its rulings and narrations are innumerable, he would never do that. What he is dismissing is that it should be engaged by dimwits who inadvertently turn night into day. He rejects as well the diminishing of effort and attention on the part of the community in engaging the *Qur'an*, thereby neglecting a fundamental cornerstone and the firmest of pillars. The only sound methodology is to direct all concerns to Allah's Book and then to rely upon *aḥādīth* of Allah's Messenger (SAW) in understanding the *Qur'an*, conveying its guidance, and implementing its rulings.

Acceptable Differences in Understanding the *Sunnah*

If a government that is stable perpetrates an injustice, does one try to enforce change by using force? There are many narrated traditions concerning this matter, which justify lengthy consideration. One who traces the opinions of our scholars on this matter finds that the majority dislike conflict and try to delay it by passing judgements that allow an armed struggle only if certain very strict stipulations are met, under conditions very difficult to fulfil. Perhaps the reason behind this apprehension is that Muslims faced tremendous turmoil at the onset of their history, where revolting against the leadership was sought even for the most trivial reason and where short-sighted individuals were given the right to govern under conditions of which they had no understanding. This caused the politics of the state to be toyed with by the ordinary masses and placed the blood of the virtuous Caliphs within the reach of the mobs.

[132] *Sunan at-Tirmidhī,* Book of the Virtues of the Qur'an, ḥadīth no. 2831.

The effects of this heedless revolt against the government left behind turmoil within the state mechanism. The effort exerted by its leaders to quell uprisings is one of the most important causes for the termination of Islamic expansion. This distraction also caused Muslims to fail in the fulfilment of their greater mission. It also caused differences of opinion regarding transgressions and errors perpetrated by the rulers. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī expressed his opinion concerning a ruler that perpetrates a wrongdoing in the following words: "Enforcing change by the use of force by any subject against his ruler is not an option because this only serves to stir up turmoil and arouse evil, leading to greater danger." Al-Ghazālī allowed repudiation of the ruler in one's own mind, or criticizing him verbally, only if it does not develop into general upheaval that would harm the state more than it would harm the individual. Pessimism in this regard reached such a stage that some legal scholars even began regarding perseverance in the face of the injustice of the ruler as a branch of faith! This is an unhealthy opinion and its unconditional acceptance served as a pretence for paralyzing the nation in the face of any injustice, until the immorality of rulers in the lands of Islam reached a point that was intolerable.

Expressing an advisory or legal opinion supporting rebellion against a ruler or submission to him requires sound vision. Reality is always misplaced between excessiveness and negligence. The pristine *Sunnah* encompasses a multitude of teachings which lay out the relationship of the Muslims with the ruler, and indicating when he should be opposed and when he should be supported. Approaching the relevant *aḥādīth* narrated on this topic requires a balanced orientation; ignoring these *aḥādīth* altogether would be better than implementing them foolishly.

Suppose that you gave your servant a bunch of keys for the rooms of a house and he hastily tried to open the door with the first key that came to hand. If he was unsuccessful, he would go to another door using another key that was also not suitable and then move on to another door once again trying an unsuitable key. He would return to you at the end without having opened a single door and may even inform you that the keys are incorrect. There is no fault with the keys; the fault is in the way in which they had been used. If the keys were entrusted to a knowledgeable, skilful person, he would have no problem in placing every key in the correct position, turning it, and opening the door. In the same manner, a suitable *ḥadīth* requires that it be placed in a similarly suitable context.

Indeed, the ruler and the subject are equally constrained by the boundaries set by Allah and there is nothing that is made exclusively permissible to one and prohibited to the other. The ruler that

violates the trust of the position bestowed upon him stands, without a doubt, in disobedience before Allah. To be rid of him is more befitting to the religion of Allah and to the religion of humankind together. If it is possible to eliminate him with only slight damage, then abstaining from doing so is certainly a crime. But if addressing the injustice leads to turmoil far greater than the injustice itself, then leaving things as they are becomes the primary consideration. It is possible to arrange the relevant *aḥādīth* on this topic in a manner that would repel any apparent contradictions between them.

It is not always allowable to hold an unjust ruler in contempt, nor is it acceptable in all circumstances to attack and expel him from his position. Some scholars rely upon the general spirit of Islam and its many teachings to oppose oppression and to stand up to tyrants, rejecting *aḥādīth* that promote reconciliation, or regarding them as abrogated. They thus obligate the Muslim not to submit to tyranny and to deal with the ruler if his transgression becomes apparent so that he is restrained from incurring the anger of Allah, no matter what suffering one would have to endure to achieve this.

We will quote the opinion of Ibn Ḥazm, who argues and defends this position. We will also comment upon it in terms of what we regard to be closest to the truth and to the laws of Islam. No matter what our position may be, Ibn Ḥazm is a free-thinking scholar entitled to his understanding and methodology. In quoting his opinion, we are more concerned with exposing the wide intellectual freedom, detailed consideration in understanding the *Sunnah,* and good assessment of the related narrations that our jurists possessed.

Ibn Ḥazm says, criticizing those advocating submission to the ruler, even if he is unjust:

> The group mentioned draw evidence, firstly, from *aḥādīth* wherein the Prophet was asked: 'Must we fight them, O Allah's Messenger?' He said: **'No. (Are they not of those) who pray.'**[133] And in another narration: '**Except if you see suggestions of disbelief of which you have proof from Allah.'**[134] And in another narration, the Prophet responded: '**Patient perseverance is obligatory even if our backs are struck and our wealth is taken.'** And another: **'And if you fear being dazzled by the glare of the sword, then pull your garment over your face and say: "Verily, I intend to let you draw my sin as well as yours onto yourself, then you will be one of the dwellers of the Fire, and that is the**

[133] *Majma' az-Zawāid*, al-Haythamī, 5/22.
[134] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Discord, ḥadīth no. 6532.

recompense of the wrong-doers" (Q. 5: 29).'[135] And in yet another narration: '**Be the slave of Allah who is slayed, and not the slave of Allah who slays.'**[136] Allah, the Most High, also says: '**And recite to them, in truth, the story of the two sons of Adam; when each offered a sacrifice (to Allah), it was accepted from the one but not from the other. (Q. 5: 27).'"**

None of the above *aḥādīth* holds any evidence for them in this matter when investigated one by one from the perspective of the chain of narrators and of their import. This is demonstrated in our book: *al-Īṣāl ila fahm ma'rifah al-Khiṣāl (The Conduit to Understanding Information on the Attributes)*. We will quote some parts from it here – if Allah wills – and we seek help from Allah, the Most High:

As far as the Prophet's (SAW) command to patiently persevere in the face of one's wealth being taken and back being struck is concerned, this is - without doubt - only in the case of the ruler doing so rightfully. In this instance there is no doubt that we should obligate patience upon ourselves, even if the subject refuses to do so. Even if a ruler is obligated to implement capital punishment he cannot decline, as he would then be showing disobedience and transgression of Allah's laws. But if this were to be done unjustly, then we seek Allah's protection for the one who thinks that the Prophet (SAW) could have commanded perseverance in such an instance. Proof of this is found where Allah, the Most Honoured and High, states: **"Help you one another in virtue, righteousness and piety; but do not help one another in sin and transgression" (Q. 5: 2).**

We know that the statements of Allah's Messenger (SAW) do not contradict those of his Lord. Allah, the Most Honoured and High, states: **"Nor does he (Muhammad) speak of (his own) desire. It is only an inspiration that is inspired (to him)" (Q. 53: 3-4).**

And again in another verse: **"Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much contradiction" (Q. 4: 82).**

It is therefore correct to hold that everything that Allah's Messenger (SAW) states is inspired by Allah, the Most Honoured and High, containing no variance, contradiction or deficiency. If this is so, then without a doubt, every Muslim should know that to take the wealth of a Muslim or non-Muslim unjustly, or to punish him unjustly, is a sin and a transgression and is strictly prohibited. Allah's Messenger (SAW) has stated that: **"Verily your blood, wealth,**

[135] *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, Book of Discord, ḥadīth no. 3948.
[136] *Al-Maqāṣid al-Ḥasanah*, al-Imām Mālik, 30.

and honour are all sanctified."[137] There is, thus, no doubt or variance concerning this on the part of any Muslim. It is oppressive to take the wealth of a Muslim or to punish him unjustly, and he is justified in trying to stop this by any means possible. If he does not do so then he is effectively helping in the promotion of sin and transgression, which is strictly prohibited, as stated in the *Qur'an*.

As far as the remaining *aḥādīth* and the story of the two sons of Adam are concerned, they serve as no form of proof whatsoever. The story of the two sons of Adam relates to a different code of law, unlike our law-code. Allah, the Most High and Honoured, states: **"To each among you, we have prescribed a law and a clear way" (Q. 5: 48).**

As far as the *aḥādīth* are concerned, it has been correctly established that Allah's Messenger (SAW) has stated: **"If any of you see an injustice, then he should change it with his hand if he is able to do so, and if he is unable, then with his tongue, and if he is unable to do even this then with his heart, and this is the weakest form of faith, behind which no traces of faith are to be found."**[138]

Allah's Messenger (SAW) also stated: **"There is no obedience to transgression, only obedience to obedience. You should only show obedience and compliance to one who does not order transgression. If one is ordered to transgress then he should show neither obedience nor compliance."**[139]

And he (SAW) also said: **"One killed protecting his wealth is a martyr. He who is slain protecting his religion is a martyr, and one slain in the face of oppression is a martyr."**[140]

The Prophet (SAW) also said: **"You shall indeed enjoin what is good and you shall indeed forbid what is unjust, or else Allah shall bring upon you of His punishment."**[141]

All these narrations stand clearly in opposition to the ones previously quoted. It can thus only be that one of these groups abrogates the other; nothing else. We are therefore obligated to establish which group of narrations is abrogated and which group remains. We established that the *aḥādīth* that prohibit fighting conform to customary principles at the beginning of

[137] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Discord, ḥadīth no. 6551.
[138] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Faith, ḥadīth no. 70.
[139] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Laws, ḥadīth no. 6611.
[140] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Injustices and Usurpation, ḥadīth no. 2300.
[141] *Musnad Aḥmad*, ḥadīth no. 22212.

> Islam while the other narrations were pronounced after the principle of fighting had been added to the Law-Code. Therefore, it is clear, that the meanings of the former *aḥādīth* were abrogated and their application lifted as soon as the Prophet (SAW) began making the latter pronouncements. It is absurd, and also strictly prohibited, to use that which has been abrogated and ignore that which abrogates, or to use that which is doubtful above that which is certain.

In response to Ibn Ḥazm, we hold that it is not correct for him to advocate abrogation as this is only allowable when one is not able to reconcile between *aḥādīth* that are thought to be contradictory. In this case reconciliation is possible.

Correcting an injustice at all levels does not necessarily imply general rebellion or fighting to the death to protect one's rights. The position that al-Ghazālī holds is closer to the truth in that armed sedition bears terrifying consequences. To make this an allowable option for any discontented individual is not a position advocated by any objective or valid legal system. The first group of *aḥādīth* is valid - in our opinion - and one is obligated to implement them when placed in the position of choosing between the lesser of two evils. The perseverance of an individual in the face of oppression directed towards him is of a lesser consequence to his livelihood and religion than the actions of individuals that cause turmoil that could result in the collapse of the state at the hands of its enemies. There are circumstances that obligate opposition, just as there are circumstances that obligate reconciliation, and the *aḥādīth* reported are applicable to both instances easily and correctly. Concerning the *aḥādīth* that Ibn Ḥazm regards as abrogated, we find that he has no evidence - from a historical perspective - to prove that the abrogating *aḥādīth* were in fact stated after the ones abrogated. In fact, the Prophet (SAW) had stated some of these *aḥādīth* towards the end of his life and it does not therefore make sense to regard them as abrogated.

Ibn Ḥazm states:

> Another proof is the statement of Allah, the Most High: **"And if two parties or groups among the believers fall to fighting, then make peace between them both, but if one of them rebels against the other, then fight you (all) against the one which rebels till it complies with the command of Allah" (Q. 49: 9)**. No Muslim disagrees that this verse - which obligates fighting against the rebellious party - is valid and not abrogated. It is correct to hold that it is the deciding factor in light of the earlier *aḥādīth*. Whatever *aḥādīth* are,

therefore, in accordance with this verse are to be regarded as abrogating and thus established and whatever is opposed to it is regarded as abrogated and thus inapplicable.

Some individuals regard this verse and the *aḥādīth* mentioned as being applicable to criminals and not to the governing authority. This, without a doubt, is incorrect as it is a mere claim without any supporting evidence, which therefore does not prevent one from insinuating that these *aḥādīth* are only applicable to certain people and within a certain time-frame. Insinuation without proof holds no basis and to make insinuations against the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* is sinful as it is equivalent to speaking about Allah with ignorance.

It is reported from Allah's Messenger (SAW) that someone had inquired about one who asks for wealth that he is not entitled to. The Prophet (SAW) said: **"Do not give it to him."** He was then asked: "And what if he attacks me?" He said: **"Then defend yourself."** He then asked: "And what if I kill him?" The Prophet (SAW) replied: **"He will enter the fire."** He then asked: "And what if he kills me?" He (SAW) said: **"Then you will enter paradise"**[142] or something to this effect.

It is also correctly proven that the Prophet (SAW) said: **"A Muslim is the brother of a Muslim. He does not endanger him nor oppress him."**[143] The Prophet (SAW) also said concerning Zakāh: **"Who asks of it in accordance with its stipulations should be given and who asks of it beyond its stipulations should not be given."**[144] This is a well established report narrated from Anas ibn Mālik, from Abū Bakr, from Allah's Messenger (SAW). It refutes the interpretation of the *aḥādīth* concerning fighting over wealth to be restricted to criminals only as criminals do not ask for *Zakāh* (alms tax); the governing authority does so. The Prophet (SAW) restricted (the reasons for the) refusal to give *Zakāh* only to instances that contradict that which he had ordered. If only the defenders of justice could unite, they would then not be challenged by the perpetrators of falsehood … We seek only Allah's help and success.

Ibn Ḥazm concludes: "It is obligatory to inform the *Imām* (political authority) of the occurrence of injustice (even if it is on a small scale) so that he may prohibit it. If he declines to do so and retracts the truth, submitting to the authority of some person or group, then he should be punished with the punishments implemented for adultery, slander and drinking, but he should not be discharged from his position. He still remains *Imām* as before. But if he refuses to implement any

[142] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Faith, ḥadīth no. 201.
[143] *Musnad Aḥmad*, ḥadīth no. 5388.
[144] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Alms, ḥadīth no. 1362.

of these obligations - in his capacity as *Imām* - and is not willing to compromise, then he should be dismissed and replaced by one who will lead with the truth, as Allah, the Most High, states: '**Help you one another in virtue, righteousness, and piety; but do not help one another in sin and transgression. And fear Allah. Verily, Allah is severe in punishment' (Q. 5: 2).** It is not allowable, in any instance, to squander the obligations of the legislation … and success is only from Allah."

We are in full agreement with Ibn Ḥazm as to the necessity of protecting the legislative process of Islam and to see to its implementation with care and accuracy. We may, however, differ as to what may be the most successful way of implementing this. Is it necessary to dismiss a ruler that perpetrates sins – as is held by Ibn Ḥazm – without exception? Or, expressing this differently, is it correct to dismiss him - if his poor political practices warrants this - no matter what harm and turmoil this may result in? This matter definitely requires wisdom and a balanced outlook. The nation does not have to tolerate oppressive revolutions, but it also does not have to accept injustice and the degradation of its concerns.

***Qiyās* (Analogy)**

The *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* are the first and last sources in matters of *'aqā'id* (belief) and *'ibādāt* (worship). No person or authority has any right to add anything to the established system of belief or practices of worship that have come to us from Allah and His Prophet (SAW). They are finite and bounded.

The matter is somewhat different with regards to *al-mu'āmalāt* (conduct), because Islamic jurisprudential rulings stretch beyond verses of the *Qur'an* and *aḥādīth*, encompassing other legislative sources that Islam points us to and places in our hands so that we may be able to face new and different realities and developments in life with the passing of time. At the forefront of these sources is *Qiyās* (Analogy), which is employed by the majority of jurists to extract rulings that are not mentioned by the Lawgiver.

Qiyās is defined as the transfer of a ruling on a particular issue, for which a text provided by the Lawgiver is known, to another and similar issue, because the two issues are linked by the same underlying cause.

An example of the use of *qiyās* is the following. The Prophet (SAW) stated: **"A person is not permitted to propose marriage to a woman that his brother [in faith] has proposed to, or to make a bid to purchase that which his brother is busy buying."**[145] On this basis, we are able to draw the analogy that a person cannot try to hire that which his brother is trying to hire because of the similarity between these issues. In all such instances there would be a transgression upon the rights of the other.

Another example is that of intoxicating drink. Both the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* prohibit intoxicating drinks. Therefore, by analogy, any substance that affects the mind in the same way that alcohol does is prohibited. The cause or reason for prohibition is that all these substances share the common characteristic of being intoxicating.

The majority of jurists are of the opinion that *qiyās* is a valid means of deducing rulings, and that its outcomes are acceptable. They quote various proofs, both textual and logical, in support of this position. We will present a summary of the most important proofs.

1. In the *Qur'an*, Allah, the Most Honourable and High, states: **"(And) if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is better and more suitable for final determination" (Q. 4: 59).** Referring differences to Allah's Book and His Messenger's (SAW) *Sunnah* is appropriate for the application of the general principles of legislation just as it is appropriate for the implementation of specific rulings. It also sanctions the transference of a ruling from one situation to another, similar one. *Qiyās* does not generate an altogether new ruling, but, rather, implements the Lawgiver's rulings in situations that are of a similar nature.

2. Allah, the Most Honoured and High, says: **"then take admonition, O you with eyes (to see)" (Q. 59: 2)**, after narrating to us the destruction of the wrongdoers. He also says: **"Indeed, in their stories is a lesson for people of understanding" (Q. 12: 111).** The evidential perspective of these verses suggests that Allah is saying: "draw analogies for yourselves from these people; if you were to do what they have done then your fate will be exactly the same as theirs." Professor 'Abd al-Wahhāb Khallāf states: "One cannot say that this is only related to physical laws and is specific only to worldly aspects. The implication of the verses is that Allah's order is consistent in all of His creation. His grace and retribution and all of His laws lead to these premises and causes

[145] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Marriage, ḥadīth no. 2531.

are due to the reasons occasioned by them. *Qiyās* is no more than a progression along Allah's established tradition, regulating the cause with its reason, in any situation in which it may be found."[146]

3. When the one who rejects resurrection says: **"Who will give life to these bones when they have rotted away and become dust?" (Q. 36: 78)**, Allah, the Most High, invalidates his suspicion with a deduction based upon analogy and thus says to His Prophet (SAW): **"Say: (O Muhammad) "He will give life to them who created them for the first time! And He is the All-Knower of creation" (Q. 36: 79).** Allah thus bases the analogy of the possibility of resurrection upon the occurrence of creation.

4. It is reported in the *Sunnah* that when Allah's Messenger (SAW) sent Mu'ādh ibn Jabal to Yemen, he asked him how he would pass judgement if required to do so. Mu'ādh replied that he would judge by Allah's Book, and if he did not find the necessary ruling in it, then with the Prophet's *Sunnah*; if he still did not find the necessary ruling there, he would exercise his own discretion, without resorting to subjectivity. The Prophet (SAW) then patted him on the chest - glad with his response - and said: **"Praise be to Allah who has guided the Messenger of Allah's messenger to that which pleases Allah's Messenger."**[147]

Qiyās is not regarded as an example of exercising one's opinion by reason, i.e. inquiry by scrutinizing the reality. Professor Khallāf says: "It is firmly established in authentic *Sunan* (Prophetic traditions) that Allah's Messenger (SAW) - in many instances where he did not receive revelation - would deduce a ruling by means of *qiyās*. The Prophet's (SAW) action in this general matter is therefore regarded as a means of legislation for his followers. There is no evidence suggesting that this was specific to the Prophet (SAW) alone."

It is reported that a young woman said to Allah's Messenger (SAW): "My father is an old man upon whom the obligation of the *ḥaj* (pilgrimage) has become incumbent, but he is not able to fulfil it. If I had to do it on his behalf, would he benefit?" He (SAW) said: **"If there was a debt**

[146] Shaykh al-Ghazālī does not provide the reference details, but, he is quoting from Professor 'Abd al-Wahhāb Khallāf's famous introductory text on Source Methodology in Islamic Jurisprudence entitled *'Ilm Uṣūl al-Fiqh*. There are several editions of this work still in print today [Translator].
[147] *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, Book of Judgements, ḥadīth no. 3119.

upon your father, would he benefit by you fulfilling it?" She replied that he would. The Prophet (SAW) then said: **"The debt owed to Allah is more deserving of being fulfilled."**[148]

It is reported that 'Umar asked the Prophet (SAW) about kissing while one was fasting i.e. kissing that did not cause one to ejaculate. The Prophet (SAW) responded by saying: **"What if you gargle your mouth while fasting?"** 'Umar responded that there was no harm in it. The Prophet (SAW) then said: **"That is enough (for you to know)."**[149] The Prophet (SAW) thus drew an analogy between kissing that does not cause ejaculation and the gargling by a fasting person, in that it does not invalidate his fast.

It is also reported that a man from the tribe of Fazārah rejected his newly-born son because the baby was dark in complexion. The Prophet (SAW) asked him: **"Do you have camels?"** After hearing his affirmative reply, the Prophet (SAW) asked him what their colours were. He said that they were red. The Prophet (SAW) then asked whether there were any brownish ones among them. He replied that there were, and to this the Prophet (SAW) responded by asking him how that could be possible. He replied that perhaps it was an extraction caused by the camel's lineage. The Prophet (SAW) then said: **"And this - i.e. his dark-complexioned son - may perhaps be an extraction of his lineage."**[150]

5. The actions of the Prophet's (SAW) companions indicate that they also made deductions using *qiyās* and that they also reinforced its rulings and conducted their affairs in its light. Indeed, after the demise of the Prophet (SAW), the first Caliph was nominated to the position of governance by an excellent example of *qiyās*. Because he had been chosen by the Prophet (SAW) to lead the prayers during the Prophet's (SAW) period of illness, the companions were prompted to say: "The Prophet (SAW) is pleased to let him lead us in matters of our religion, should we not be pleased to let him lead us in our worldly matters?" They thus drew an analogy between governing the state and leading the prayer.

'Ali (RA) is reported to have said: "The truth is known by the standards set by those who possess knowledge."

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[148] *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, Book of Rituals, ḥadīth no. 2900.
[149] *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, Book of Fasting, ḥadīth no.2037.
[150] *Musnad Aḥmad*, ḥadīth no. 6892.

During the reign of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, Abū Musa al-Ash‘arī had said: “Concerning understanding that which is brought forward and for which a ruling is not found in the *Qur’an* or the *Sunnah*, analogy between matters is used, judging by similar examples and then relying upon that which would be most pleasing to Allah and closest to the truth, as seems apparent to you.”

The Sphere of *Qiyās*

The logic of the intellect and our instinct obliges us to respect *qiyās* in the deduction of the law. How can one disregard a matter in which harm is clearly apparent and then consider another matter proven to encompass this very same harm? Another consideration is that the incidents in which the Lawgiver has specifically expressed a judgement are restricted, so should the law be restricted as well to only these few incidents, or should the wisdom behind these judgements be identified so that it may bring benefit to a much wider sphere? Notwithstanding, *qiyās* is only used in the field of *mu‘āmalāt* (conduct) and with regards to issues where it is possible for the intellect to identify causes and to declare an opinion. As far as *‘ibādāt* (acts of worship) are concerned, it is the text alone that is to be resorted to. There is thus no expression of opinion with regards to that which is monopolized by the Lawgiver alone, through His Wisdom. Therefore, questions such as the number of cycles in prayer, or the days appointed for fasting, or the number of circumambulations of the Ka’bah, or the types of atonements, or the shares of *Zakāh*, or the punishments for adultery and slander, or the stoning of the *Jamr* (a ritual of the pilgrimage), etc; all are determined by Allah alone.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (may Allah have mercy on him) states in his book *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn (The Revival of the Religious Sciences)*:

> The pilgrim should undertake the stoning of the *Jamr* with the intention of showing compliance to an order, portraying servitude and bondage, invoking within him clear imitation, without any consideration for the self or the intellect in this matter. His intention should then be to try and imitate Ibrāhīm (AS) when the Devil (may Allah curse him) exposed himself to him at that particular place. In this way he is able to draw relevance to his pilgrimage, or else he invalidates it (by not performing this ritual) through showing disobedience. Allah’s command to stone the Devil is so that he may be expelled and his expectations may be destroyed. If one argues that Satan had exposed himself to Ibrāhīm (AS), who had seen him and therefore stoned him, but that Satan has not exposed himself to me, then know that these thoughts are from Satan and it is he who has cast them into your heart to weaken your desire to perform the stoning ritual, making you imagine that there is no

> benefit in it and that it is similar to a game, and questioning why you should occupy yourself with it. Expel him from within you in earnest and prepare yourself for the stoning ritual in defiance of him. Know that although it is apparent that you are stoning a barrier, you are in reality stoning the face of Satan and dealing him the deathblow. One cannot show defiance to Satan except by acting out the orders of Allah, the Glorious and Sublime, out of awe for Him and simply because it is His command, without any consideration for one's self.

Qiyās is only resorted to in the absence of a text and is not used if a text from the *Qur'an* or *Sunnah* on a relevant matter is available. Another point that facilitates our understanding is that the scope and form of acts of worship are restricted and do not change with time. In fact, any addition - or subtraction for that matter - is a transgression that is to be completely rejected. Jurists thus adopted the practice of restricting acts of worship within the framework in which they had been established. They, therefore, regarded any introduced changes as *bid'ah* (a reprehensible heretical innovation) that could not have been introduced except by one prone to excess.

As far as conduct is concerned, the ruling is exactly the opposite. General principles and derivations served to fulfil their necessary function for people of every era, thereby shaping that which they required in the fields of legislation, legal opinions and implementation. By this process, Islamic jurisprudence expanded and grew, giving rise to various orientations, schools of thought and opinions. The bond between these new horizons in Islamic jurisprudence and the reality of Islam is like the bond between a tree and its living roots, or like the bond between consumable commodities and the production mechanism. If we were to imagine that a printing press grew bigger because it had printed thousands of books, it would then be correct to say that Islam has added to its origins, or has expanded with time because its jurisprudence has increased in volume since the era of the Prophet (SAW) and his companions. This is the kind of doubt cast upon Islam by Orientalists, with the bigoted roots of the Crusader era still growing strongly within their depths. They, unfortunately, do not recognize Islam as having been revealed from the heavens, but rather regard it as an earthly effort with limited beginnings that developed over time. Any man that enters the field of research freely and is of the opinion that Christianity and Judaism are religions but that Islam is a fabrication is the biggest liar in all of creation, even if he is supposedly promoting intellectual freedom and neutrality.

Dr Muhammad Yūsuf Mūsa has exposed this false theory directed at Islamic jurisprudence in a thesis on the jurisprudence of the companions and their followers. He refutes Orientalist insinuations as follows: "The Orientalists have their theories on the reasons and extent of this

development, but they add to it things that do not concern the matter, thereby differing with our theories, i.e. theories of Muslim scholars. They regard Islam as something that is always open to development, even, for example, acts of worship and matters related to it. Even Ignaz Goldziher, a renowned Orientalist with a firm foothold in the field of Islamic Studies, regards the development of jurisprudence - which began immediately after the Prophet's (SAW) era - to be based upon pressing needs that are faced in everyday life. He says, "Islam, in all its relationships, did not come into being as a complete system." That is what he insinuates! May Allah disgrace him! This is certainly farfetched for a religion whose book confirms, in many verses, that the Prophet (SAW) is Allah's Messenger to all of creation, and to all of humankind, with no differentiation between Arab and non-Arab, or between White and Black! As such, the Prophet (SAW) was truly the seal of the prophets, just as his message is the final of all of Allah's messages and is thus valid for the entire world, encompassing all nations and valid for all time to come.

'Ibādāt **(Acts of Worship) and** ***Mu'āmalāt*** **(Conduct)**

We are obligated to ponder the following assertion made by Goldziher: "Islamic Jurisprudence - in aspects that are related to both religion and the world - has submitted to codification." Does he mean that the conventions of development have affected acts of worship, as they have undoubtedly affected matters of conduct? We believe that this is exactly what he means when speaking about the development of jurisprudence as a general development that affects both religious and worldly matters. He brushes aside the truth as well as historical fact when asserting that "acts of worship were also subjected to development". Acts of worship, in all their different manifestations, have not changed since the era of the Prophet (SAW) right up until today. This is because the Law - i.e. the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* together - had specified all the required rituals, leaving no room for *ijtihād* (exertion of opinion), which is the only path that leads to development. The difference in opinion amongst Jurists concerning certain actions and formats is due to different understandings of the *Qur'an* or is based upon differing reports from the Prophet (SAW).

In another place, Goldziher says: "People in Egypt, Persia and the Levant reconciled their customs, practices and different cultures with the new laws. In brief, Islamic Jurisprudence, whether with regards to religion or worldly matters, had submitted to codification. The *Qur'an* itself served as a source of only a few laws and it is not possible that these laws could encompass all the unanticipated dealings that came forth after the various conquests. It was restricted to the

conditions of the unsophisticated Arabs and specifically directed at them but was, as a result, insufficient for this new situation."

Discussion of this Theory

His contentions that Islam "did not come to this world in a perfected manner," and that "the *Qur'an* was restricted to the conditions of the unsophisticated Arabs and specifically directed at them" is totally incorrect. Indeed, Islam came to this world in a perfected manner, including aspects of both livelihood and the hereafter, including all-encompassing laws pertaining to matters of religion and livelihood. (History bears testimony to what we are saying, although the framework of our research does not allow substantiation.) These were, however, expressed as principles and norms, as is the requirement of all general laws and comprehensive systems. In other words, it is comprised of universalities, leaving the finer details and specifics to those responsible for its comprehension and implementation, relying always upon the inspiration of the Islamic spirit and the objectives of the law. This divine law is therefore always suitable for application in all conditions, if we study it deeply and know how to be guided by it and are able to deduce from it that which is not explicitly stated. As such, the insinuation that the *Qur'an* is restricted to the conditions of "the unsophisticated Arabs" alone is proven to be untenable.

There is no harm in jurists differing on the understanding of a particular text, or in questioning the authenticity of any *ḥadīth*. This sphere is wide enough for the exercising of their opinions. Nevertheless, the comprehensiveness of the *Qur'an* and the Prophetic *Sunnah* - on all rulings concerning acts of worship, and what we regard as "personal affairs", was finalized in detail, and with restrictions, leaving no objective unaddressed. The non-comprehensiveness of the *Qur'an* regarding rules of conduct and the insufficiency of what is reported from the Prophet (SAW) on this matter bears important meaning and is of great significance. In our opinion, this points to a restriction upon all that concerns acts of worship and the like, to that which is reported in the two sacred sources of the *Sharī'ah* i.e. the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. This is indispensable when we realize that the rules governing devotional acts of worship lay outside the sphere of human understanding. It is therefore absolutely necessary to refer to these two sources because they sufficiently address these aspects.

Conduct is concerned with worldly matters and its rulings conform to occurrences and relationships that continually arise and change. It was in reference to this that the Prophet (SAW)

said: **"You are most knowledgeable concerning matters of your world."**[151] This translates as permission for us to exercise our opinions concerning worldly matters, as long as we do so in the light of the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah,* bearing in mind the Qur'anic verse that states that the Prophet (SAW) does not speak out of vain desire.[152]

We have recollected, in these few pages, the comments of Dr Yūsuf Muhammad Mūsa on the views of the audacious Orientalist, Goldziher. This Orientalist further expanded his lies against Islam and followed a path that leaves one astonished by his attacks on our religion. His work is characterized by a methodology that is based upon lies and deeply rooted in evil and aggression. As a result, we have written a book especially for the purpose of refuting his work and the works of others like him. The book is entitled *Difā' 'an al-'Aqīdah wa ash- Sharī'ah did Maṭā'in al-Mustashriqīn (Defending the 'Aqīdah and the Sharī'ah against the Slander of the Orientalists)*. There are syndicates that exploit academic research and we are obligated to deal with them harshly so as to put an end to their evil and to expose the colonialist powers that hide behind them.

Ijmā'[153] (Consensus)

"Differences in understanding" regarding particular rulings is something that is bound to occur. However, if a ruling is agreed upon (when based upon established sources), and objectionable issues have been resolved by people of learning, it can only mean that the ruling is correct and that the community has reached consensus on it. Therefore all Muslims have to comply, without exception. This is an example of obedience to those in authority, something that the *Qur'an* alludes to, and whose sphere encompasses other matters that are linked to consensus as well.

After thinking about the matter for a long time, Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh concluded:

> *Those in authority* denotes a group of Muslims consisting of leaders and influential people such as governors, judges, scholars, generals and all other leaders that people approach when in need or to resolve issues pertaining to general welfare. Therefore, when these people agree upon a matter or a ruling, then obedience is obligatory, with the following stipulations:
> • That [such people] be from amongst us;

[151] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Virtues, ḥadīth no. 4358.
[152] See (Q. 53: 3) [Translator].
[153] The majority of scholars are of the opinion that *Ijmā'* follows the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* and comes before *Qiyās* in the deduction of Laws.

• That they do not disobey any command of Allah or any *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW) that has been unanimously declared as authentic, confirmed by a plurality of narrators (*al-Mutawātir*);
• That they be elected to address the matter and agree to do so; and
• That the matter upon which they agree is for the general welfare, i.e., matters that those in authority have influence over and are familiar with.

Leaders and influential people have no say as far as acts of worship and doctrine are concerned. These matters are taken from Allah and His Messenger (SAW) alone and no one has the right to assert their personal opinions. Where consensus has been reached, the general follows the specific and the individual follows the group in all laws that have been agreed upon, taking into consideration the welfare of the community.

Scholars have defined *ijmā'* as: "The agreement of scholars from the community of Muhammad (SAW) (i.e. the Muslim community) upon a legislative ruling, in a particular era." Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh's comments add a further dimension to this meaning, which we should consider as well, even if other scholars have not considered them in their definition of *ijmā'*, because the obligation of showing obedience to one's leaders and uniformity in the conduct of the general masses are important principles of Islam. Allah, the Most Honoured and High, has ordered this in the following verses: **"And whoever contradicts and opposes the Messenger (Muhammad) after the right path has been shown clearly to him, and follows other than the believers' way, We shall keep him in the path he has chosen, and burn him in Hell - what an evil destination" (Q. 4: 115).**

"And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allah and be not divided among yourselves." (Q.3: 103).

The Islamic community occupies an important position in the sight of Allah and His support for it distances it from any misguided understandings or blunders in judgement. The community's agreement upon matters other than the obligatory almost prevents this from happening due to the presence of accomplished scholars. How could this happen when Allah Himself says: **"You are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind" (Q. 3: 110)?**

And in another verse: **"Thus We have made you a just nation, that you be witnesses over mankind and the Messenger (Muhammad) be a witness over you" (Q. 2: 143).**

In other words, Allah has granted Muslims authority over humankind in judging their declarations, just as He has granted the Prophet (SAW) authority over Muslims in judging their adherence to His declarations. It is obvious that "Muslims" does not mean those that are good in actions and words, but rather indicates people of learning who are heedful, experienced and qualified to understand the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*. Only the directives of such people are to be followed and only their consensus is to be adhered to. In our opinion, to oppose their guidance is to slip away from Islam itself.

The Prophetic Tradition contains recommendations regarding the consensus of the community as a binding truth. These reports serve to deal with individual disputes and also to address what is odd regarding thought and behaviour, thereby making the community a single unit in the service of its sources, be it the Prophetic Tradition, or the *Qur'an*. The Prophetic Traditions reported in this regard demonstrate how this community is protected from falling into error and have been reported in different ways by trustworthy narrators. Consider, for example, the following statements:

"My followers will not agree upon an error."[154]

"My followers will not agree upon what misguides."[155]

"I asked my Lord to ensure that my followers do not agree upon what misguides and He acceded."[156] This narration is also reported with the phrase **"upon an error."**[157]

Also reported are: **"Allah's hand is with the group."**[158]

"Follow the greatest majority."[159]

"He who leaves the group by the distance of a hand-space has removed the noose of Islam from his neck."[160]

"There will still remain a group of my followers upon the truth until Allah's command is sent forth."[161]

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[154] I have not encountered this statement with the word *Khaṭā'* (error) [Translator].
[155] *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, Book of Discord, ḥadīth no. 3940.
[156] *Musnad Aḥmad*, ḥadīth no. 25966.
[157] See note 154, above.
[158] *Sunan an-Nisā'ī,* Book of the Sanctity of Blood, ḥadīth no. 3954.
[159] *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, Book of Discord, ḥadīth no. 3940.
[160] *Musnad Aḥmad*, ḥadīth no. 20581.
[161] *Sunan at-Tirmidhī,* Book of Discord, ḥadīth no. 2155.

"My followers will be divided into such and such sects, all of them in the fire except one." It was asked: And which sect is that? He said: **"The (united) group."**[162]

A sector of the Muslim community, amongst them the Mu'tizilite scholar *an-Naẓẓām*, does not accept *ijmā'* as a legislative source. He looked at the validity of a ruling from the perspective of its source, whether rational or textual, without considering its background. He therefore define *ijmā'* as, "Any statement whose authority has been implemented, even the statement of a single person." As far as I am concerned, this opinion does not stand firm as a source of consensus because there can be no consensus upon a matter based on weak authority. Such rulings are expected to merge and join together with other rulings that are generally accepted. They may thus contradict them if based upon weak authority.

The truth of the matter is that *ijmā'* is a valid authoritative source that the majority of scholars have relied upon. Shaykh 'Ali 'Abd ar-Razzāq said: "In reality, they speak about *ijmā'* as a genuine matter of fact, recalling examples from different situations and contexts."

Some of the examples that they put forward for established consensus are similar to those that al-Āmidī relates concerning the agreement of all Muslims - not just leaders and influential people – on the obligation of the five prayers, fasting in the month of **Ramaḍān**, *zakāh* (the alms tax), the pilgrimage, and other laws that are generally not required to be known by everyone out of necessity (unlike the ones mentioned above).

Another example is related by the author of *Musallim ath-Thubūt* concerning the preference of that which is conclusive over that which is doubtful: "They have witnessed that all the scholars from amongst the Companions and their followers, in all eras, would put forward what is conclusive and it is known through experience that none of them had retracted. It was thus undoubtedly established that agreement had taken place amongst them. The case is similar with regards to the Caliphate: it was witnessed that all the companions in Madinah made the pledge of allegiance and that none of them retracted their pledges. Even those from outside of Madinah came to pledge allegiance to the authority of Abū Bakr (RA). This was then followed by everyone from all over and in this way it became known that consensus had been reached. Other examples of rulings entered into through *ijmā'* are the consensus reached allowing the hiring of bathrooms, the charging of fees by the barber, the collection of land-tax, the invalidity of the

[162] *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, Book of Discord, ḥadīth no. 3983.

marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man, the inheritance of grandparents being one-sixth, the prohibition of grandchildren receiving inheritance while their parents are still alive and many other examples."

The author of *at-Taḥrīr* quotes Abū Isḥāq al-Isfarāyīnī, who said: "We are aware that the issues pertaining to *ijmā'* are in excess of 20,000. With this we can refute those atheists who state that this religion is burdened with differences in opinion. If this were the truth, such consensus could not have been reached. We thus prove them wrong by stating that there is consensus on over 20,000 issues. Concerning subsidiary issues, the consensus reached in this regard exceeds 100,000 issues. This leaves only about 1,000 issues around which the expression of difference in opinion exists."

In reality, the implementation of *ijmā'* in matters upon which agreement has been reached should be the primary goal of all intelligent people because it leads to the unity of the Islamic community. It also serves to direct their intellectual activities towards fields that rightfully deserve independent research, fields in which their intelligence may be fully utilized. In this light, we may ask:

- What is the value of conflict in matters of the unseen?
- What is the benefit of stirring up discord in matters of worship?
- What is the significance of an irregular understanding of a text upon whose meaning scholars have already reached agreement?

All these issues - in addition to being wrong - only serve to weaken our strength and confuse our minds. However, no harm is caused if an intelligent person promotes investigation in general and universal matters, thereby giving guidance in fields not pursued by earlier scholars. This is in fact one of the shortcomings of Muslims. If only all of them could emulate the advice of the poet who said:

> And even if I may be the last
> of my generation
> I would bring forth that
> which my predecessors could not.[163]

[163] These verses were composed by the renowned 11th century blind Arab poet, Abūl 'Alā'a al-Ma'arrī, from his collection entitled *Saqṭ az-Zand* (The Tinder Spark) [Translator].

I read a book written by an engineer in which he interprets the reality of prayer in a way that is unknown to Muslims in all of their fourteen centuries of existence. I was astonished by his foolishness and his violation of *ijmā'* (i.e. the consensus regarding the prayer). I asked myself: couldn't this innovator find an opportunity to express his intelligence in the field of engineering instead of busying himself, and us, with all this triviality.

No Difference of Opinion concerning the Sources of Islam

We have thus far discussed the references of Islam, its legislative sources, the points of reference of its scholars and the boundaries of its authority. The Islamic community knows no other sources across its development and historical lifespan and, as such, only recognizes these. Differences do arise around terminology - not subject matter – concerning, for example, the binding nature of *qiyās* or *ijmā'*. These are minor differences that evoke inconvenience, but are not regarded as irreconcilable because any rule established by *qiyās,* for example (by those in favour of it), may just as well be established by another theory based on source-matter from the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* by those who reject *qiyās*. That is why we say that differences lie in terminology and not in reality, thereby making reconciliation easy.

Those who reject *ijmā'* do not assume that general opinion is able to issue forth a ruling from itself without any link to the textual sources of Islam. One cannot issue a ruling and give it authority by general agreement; this is wrong. *Ijmā'* does not possess the ability to do that. People, as many as they may be, do not serve as sources for deriving religious rulings. It has been clearly established that *ijmā'* is completely reliant upon the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*. Its effect is to resolve arguments concerning issues addressed and resolved by the agreement of scholars in the position to make rulings and prohibitions.

We still have to resolve a false impression that may bother some short-sighted individuals, who suggest that the Shī'ah have other sources by which they understand the religion, thereby departing from the majority of Muslims. This is clearly taking the matter too far.[164] The Shī'ah do not deviate from the majority in relying upon the sources that we have just explained. After the dispute around the Caliphate and the split concerning the appointment of the Caliph had settled, it becomes futile for this division to remain. Shī'ah views, as such, have become no different than

[164] I am not a Shī'ah but I believe that the relationships between the different Islamic sects can follow a path that is more advantageous to Islam and closer to impartiality than the one it is upon now - only if we get to know each other better.

that of any other Islamic school of thought with regards to understanding the sources and their sub-divisions. This is made clear in the following extract, which we have quoted from the book *With the Imāmiyyah Shī'ah* by Professor Mahmūd Jawād Mughnīyyah. In it he puts forward his views concerning the *Qur'an*, *Sunnah*, *Ijmā'*, and *Qiyās*:

Adherence to the *Qur'an*

The Imāmiyyah are extremely attached to the *Qur'an*, guarding over it and showing it great respect. They derive their beliefs and rulings from it and use it to refute any obscurity. They regard the *Qur'an* as the greatest miracle and the only correct standard by which the truth and guidance is measured. They also report that their scholars order them to judge their views in the light of the *Qur'an* and if they contradict the *Qur'an* they are regarded as lies and inventions that must be completely rejected.

No Fabrication in the *Qur'an*

It is impossible for the *Qur'an* to be touched by fabrication, either through addition or by deficiency, as is made clear in the ninth verse of Sūrah al-Ḥijr: **"Verily We it is who have sent down the Reminder (i.e. the *Qur'an*) and surely We will guard it" (Q. 15: 9).**

Then again in Sūrah Fuṣṣilat: **"Falsehood cannot come to it from before it or behind it, (it is) sent down by the All-Wise, worthy of all praise" (Q. 41: 42).**

The Imāmiyyah are accused of regarding the *Qur'an* as being deficient of certain verses in spite of the fact that their earlier and present-day scholars - in their capacity as religious authorities - clearly state that the *Qur'an* is no different from what is in the possession of people today.

Divisions of *Ḥadīth*

The Shī'ah divide *ḥadīth* into two categories: *Mutawātir* and *Āḥād*. *Mutawātir* is a *ḥadīth* that is transmitted by a group of such a large number of transmitters that it would be impossible for them to agree or collude upon a fabrication. This type of *ḥadīth* is regarded as valid proof and it is obligatory to act upon it. *Āḥād* is a *ḥadīth* whose transmitters do not reach the level of *at-tawātur* (impeccable plurality - as above), but may have one or more transmitter. *Aḥādīth al-Āḥād* are further divided into four categories:

1. *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Authentic): This is if the transmitter is from the Imāmiyyah and has been found to be just, by the required methodology.
2. *Ḥasan* (Good): If the transmitter is from the Imāmiyyah and is praiseworthy, not having any record of being unjust, or even just for that matter.

3. *Muwatthaq* (Attested): If the transmitter is a Muslim, but not a Shī'ah and is trustworthy and honest in narration.

4. *Da'īf* (Weak): Anything not falling into the descriptions just mentioned; for example a non-Muslim transmitter, or one who is a deviant Muslim, or one whose character is unknown, or a chain of narration in which all the transmitters are not recorded would be regarded as weak.

Acting Upon the *Ḥadīth*

The Imāmiyyah regard it is as obligatory to act upon *aḥādīth* that are *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Ḥasan* and *Muwatthaq*, because of the strength of the chain of narrators. They reject *aḥādīth* that are *Da'īf* because of the weakness in the chain. They further state that *Da'īf aḥādīth* may come to be regarded as strong if their implementation was found to be widespread amongst the earlier jurists. Their regard for *Da'īf* (keeping in mind their awe and dedication to the religion, and their closeness to the first generation) exposes the existence of a link with a reality that these jurists had experienced but that we may be unaware of. Due to the existence of this link, the *ḥadīth* may be regarded as authentic and we may overlook the discrepancies of the transmitter.

Similarly, a strong *ḥadīth* may be regarded as weak if it is found to have been neglected by the classical jurists. Their lack of knowledge concerning it, even though it should have been within their sights, exposes a link that calls for the rejection of this specific *ḥadīth*, even if its transmitter is found to be reliable.

The following are some of the criteria stipulated by the Shī'ah for identifying a fabricated *ḥadīth*:

- That it is found to contradict a text of the *Qur'an*;
- It is contradictory to an established Prophetic *Sunnah*, or to reason;
- It is found to be poorly expressed, i.e. not eloquent by the standards of the Arabic language;
- The *ḥadīth* informs us of an important event that should have been transmitted widely, but is found to be transmitted by one narrator only;
- The transmitter is found to be in the service of a despotic ruler.

***Ijmā'* (Consensus)**

Ijmā' developed in Madinah after the demise of the Prophet (SAW), specifically amongst his companions. It is well known that in the Prophet's (SAW) era there was no other authority on religious matters except him. In the era of the companions, all of the jurists - and jurisprudence for that matter – was located in Madinah. It was thus easy to know the opinions

of everyone that expressed views on a matter because they were few in number. Their status and positions in society were also well known to all. After the spread of Islam, study circles were established in every city, led by teachers of religious knowledge. It became difficult to gain the consensus of all the scholars, more so because, at that time, codification and writing were not well established practices. The Shī'ah divide *Ijmā'* into various divisions which are further divided into subdivisions.

Ijmā', with regards to timeframes, is divided into three periods:

1. Ijmā' of the Sahābah (Companions):

This comes into being when all the companions have agreed upon a legislative ruling. Both the Shī'ah and ahl as-Sunnah regard it as mandatory to consider this consensus as a principle of the *Sharī'ah* (Law). They differ, however, on the reason that points to it being regarded as mandatory. The Shī'ah regard it as authoritative because of the presence of the Imām ('Ali (RA)) amongst the companions. The ahl as-Sunnah say that it is authoritative because of the *ḥadīth* that states: **"My Community will never agree upon misguidance."**[165] In any case, the result is exactly the same: an obligation to act upon the consensus of the companions in all of the schools of thought.

With regards to the *ijtihād* (opinion) of one of the companions, the four schools of thought all confer that it is necessary to act upon a statement of a companion if no opinion to the contrary is found in the *Qur'an* or the Prophetic *Sunnah*. This is because he is the most knowledgeable as to what the intention of the Prophet (SAW) may have been, through the honour of accompanying him and also because he had lived in the era of revelation. Therefore his *ijtihād* (opinion) is given preference to the *ijtihād* of anyone that came after him. Al-Ghazālī, al-Āmidī, and ash-Shawkānī are of the opinion that a statement of a companion is not authoritative or binding because the companions themselves had agreed that it was allowable for them to differ amongst themselves in matters of *ijtihād*. If a statement of a companion is not binding amongst the companions themselves, how can it be regarded - by analogy - as binding on others. This opinion is also favoured by the Shī'ah.

2. Ijmā' of Scholars in eras other than the Era of the Companions:

The agreement of scholars in all the Islamic precincts and cities in an era other than that of the companions and the Righteous Caliphs is given due regard by the Shī'ah and is binding for the community. Regional *ijmā'*, i.e. a specific agreement like the *ijmā'* of the people of Iraq, or the people of al-Ḥijāz, etc, cannot be regarded as a subject for research because, in reality, it is not regarded as *ijmā'*.

[165] *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, Book of Discord, ḥadīth no. 3940.

3. Ijmā' of Scholars in all Eras and Places:

If all the scholars of the different Islamic schools of thought, in all eras and places, from the era of the Prophet (SAW) to the present time, agreed upon a matter, then under no conditions can this agreement be transgressed upon or disregarded. This ruling undoubtedly becomes a religious necessity, and whoever disobeys it is regarded as having rejected one of the principles of Islam. If the scholars of a specific school of thought agree upon a matter, then it is regarded as a ruling that would only be specific to that school and whoever rejects it has rejected a principle of that school and not necessarily a principle of Islam.

Reason as a Source (*Dalīl al-'Aql*)

The scholar is required to search for his rulings - before anything else - in one of three sources: The *Qur'an*, the *Sunnah*, and *ijmā'*. If the ruling is found in one of these three sources then there is no room left for taking recourse to reason (as a source). If the scholar is unsuccessful in employing these three sources, he is then allowed to resort to the fourth source.

In the early stages this source was "the idea of public welfare", which differs according to differences in opinions and theories. The companions were not aware of terminology such as *qiyās* (analogy), *al-barā'ah* (freedom from liability), *al-istiṣḥāb* (presumption of continuity), and whatever other principles that were defined after the era of the companions. If a companion was questioned on an issue he would exert his reason to formulate an opinion based upon the general-welfare of the community, and the spirit of Islam, not conforming to any specific rule or principle. There are many examples to this effect, such as the following ruling by the second Caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb: Mālik narrates that aḍ-Ḍiḥāk ibn Qays dug a water inlet for himself and wanted to pass it over the land of Muhammad ibn Musallamah, but the latter refused. aḍ-Ḍiḥāk said: "You refuse me but it is beneficial for you, as you can draw water from it, and it does not harm you," but Muhammad still refused. aḍ-Ḍiḥāk then spoke to 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb about this. 'Umar then ordered Muhammad to grant the permission, but Muhammad still refused. 'Umar then said: "Do not prohibit your brother from that which benefits you and does not harm you," but Muhammad still refused. 'Umar then said: "By Allah, he (will be allowed) to pass through, even if he crosses over your stomach!"[166]

After the era of the companions, *ijtihād* only focused upon specific principles and rules. The various schools of thought, however, differ in the appointment of this fourth source.

[166] *al-Muwaṭṭa*, al-Imām Mālik, Passing Judgement on a Matter of Utility, ḥadīth no. 1236.

The Schools of Thought of the *ahl as-Sunnah* and the Fourth Source

The Hanafi and Māliki Schools say that the fourth source is *Qiyās* (Analogy), *Istihsān* (Juristic Preference), and *Istiṣlāḥ* (Welfare or Well-Being). The Shāfi'ī School says that it is *Qiyās* and they do not rely upon *Istiḥsān* and *Istiṣlāḥ*. The Hanbali School says that the fourth source of legislation is *Qiyās* and *Istiṣlāḥ*.

Qiyās is the joining of a matter that has no textual basis to one that has a textual basis, i.e. they are joined in a legal ruling because they share the same principle cause. For example, there is a legal text stating that the grandmother of a mother inherits, but there is no text stating the same for the grandmother of a father. As such, the grandmother of a father will also inherit from his estate because an analogy is drawn from the first instance, as they are both grandmothers. This is the closest example of *qiyās* by equality.

The Shī'ah reject *qiyās*, and so do the Ẓāhirī jurists of the *ahl as-Sunnah*. Ibn Ḥazm has mounted a scathing attack upon *qiyās* and those who accept it. The rejection or acceptance of *qiyās* is based on academic considerations and does not concern doctrine (*al-'itiqād*). As we have said before, the disagreement in this matter concerns terminology and not subject-matter.

There is no harm in briefly presenting the views of a Shī'ah Scholar from Iran, who discusses the sources of legislation amongst the Imāmiyyah.

Sources of Legislation according to the al-Imāmiyyah

Shaykh Muhammad Taqī al-Qūmī says:

> There are four sources of legislation according to the Imāmiyyah: The *Qur'an*, the *Sunnah*, *ijmā'* and reason or intellectual proofs.
>
> *The Qur'an*
>
> One of the greatest blessings bestowed upon Muslims is that they do not disagree over their Book. A Muslim in the furthest point West has exactly the same *Qur'an* as a Muslim in the furthest point East. Manuscripts of the *Qur'an* in the Arab World are exactly the same as those in other countries. There is not a single difference in any verse, writing style, or letter. If the word "raḥma" is found written with an open *tā* (from the Arabic alphabet), this would be the case in every manuscript in every Muslim country, with no difference between Arab

and foreigner, or Sunni and Shī'ah. Over and above this complete agreement with regards to Allah's Book, Muslims also regard their *Qur'an* as the force by which Allah binds them together, something of momentous significance and also the primary source of the *Sharī'ah*.

The *Sunnah*

The Shī'ah and Sunni schools do not differ with regards to the *Sunnah* of Allah's Messenger (SAW). All Muslims unanimously agree that it is the second source of the *Sharī'ah*. There is also no disagreement amongst Muslims in regarding any saying, action, or tacit approval of the Prophet (SAW) as a *Sunnah* that must be recognized. The difference, however, lies between one who heard something from the Prophet (SAW) in his era and one who received a *ḥadīth* by some other means. The issue of authenticity and acceptability of transmitters thus arises, thereby leading to differences of opinion. In other words, differences centre on the means of transmission and not on the *Sunnah* itself. This generates disputes between the Sunnis and the Shī'ah from time to time. The dispute is a *minor* one, not a *major* one.[167] There is no disagreement with regards to accepting what is transmitted from the Prophet (SAW). What is disputed is that if the *ḥadīth* is transmitted by only one narrator, did it in fact originate from the Prophet (SAW) or not.

At times, two, or even several, reports are transmitted on the same issue from the Imāms of the different schools of thought as these Imāms are from an era relatively closer to ours. Even Imām 'Ali - who is regarded as the stipulated Imām by the Shī'ah and is also followed by the Sunnis' - has had two different reports transmitted from him on conflicting issues; one followed by the ahl as-Sunnah and the other by the Shī'ah. If we seek authentication on reports transmitted from the various Imāms, it is only natural that with regards to the Prophetic *Sunnah* the matter requires a greater degree of precision and authentication. The Prophet's (SAW) statements are legislation and he is the only legislator for Muslims; what he regards as permissible will remain so until the Day of Reckoning, and, so too, what he regards as prohibited.

To reach the significance of the Prophet's (SAW) statement - so that one knows whether the *ḥadīth* is conditional or unconditional, general or specific, one is required to have knowledge of the transmitter so that some link or characteristic which has an effect upon judging the *ḥadīth* is not left out. There is no disagreement about regarding the *Sunnah* as the second

[167] This is an expression common to scholars of logic. Its basis is that the first premise regarding proof is called *minor*, and the Second is called *major.* When someone says: This *ḥadīth* is a statement of the Prophet (SAW) and all of his statements have to be followed and regarded as obligatory; therefore this *ḥadīth* is obligatory, the critique of this would be that: There is no disagreement concerning the major premise, but inquiries may surround the minor premise, i.e. is this *ḥadīth* really a statement of the Prophet (SAW)?

source of legislation; disagreement does, however, surround the acceptance or rejection of the transmitter. This is not something specific to the ahl as-Sunnah and Shī'ah only, but rather a common difference amongst the various schools of thought of the ahl as-Sunnah itself. For example, there are many transmitters that are acceptable to ash-Shāfi'ī but not to others. However, the majority of schools still accept the reports of any of the companions.

The Shī'ah stipulate that the report should be transmitted along the path of the Imāms from the Prophet's (SAW) household. This stipulation is because of several reasons, one of which is their belief that [the Imāms] are the most knowledgeable people with regards to the *Sunnah*. The result in most cases does not vary. The prayer, for example, is not described in detail in the *Qur'an*. The details are derived from the *Sunnah*, from reports on how the Prophet (SAW) performed his prayer. In spite of this, we see that the difference between the two groups is very slight, even though the pillars and smaller details regarding the prayer are many. The case is the same with regards to *Ḥajj* (the pilgrimage) and other things.

Ijmā' (Consensus)
Ijmā' is regarded as one of the sources of legislation by the Imāmiyyah, as it is by others, and is placed as the third source, after the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*. The consensus of the Imāms upon a ruling exposes an authority lying within it, i.e. it is safeguarded from falling into error. If it were not for this authority, scholars - bearing in mind their devoutness in making legal judgements - would not agree on the same opinion. There is, therefore, an inherent authority, which the binding nature of *ijmā'* relies upon and exposes.

His Eminence, Shaykh al-Qūmī, then goes on to discuss their fourth source, which is reason. This is, however, not the place to explain it in detail.

After this exposition, it is my opinion that the extent of disagreement between the two groups is not very significant. These disagreements can easily be overcome through dedication to authentic Islam and the unity of the community. The maintenance of estrangement between the *ahl as-Sunnah* and the *Shī'ah* is therefore something that is not sanctioned by religion nor by reason.

CHAPTER TWO: ISLAMIC THOUGHT

At this point, it is important to place before the reader a sketch of Islamic thought, with the stages of its development through the passage of time. We will take into consideration the factors that maintained it on its course, as well as those that distorted it, reflected its brilliance, or made it appear dull. The *Muqaddimah*[168] (Prolegomena) of ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān ibn Khaldūn, the renowned Arab Historian, contains a sober and well-composed elaboration on this subject spread across its various chapters. This book has no equal in terms of depth and methodology. Dr Muhammad al-Bahī has presented a good summary of Ibn Khaldūn’s discussion, with an explanation and an accurate commentary that brings together the various aspects of the work. We will capture the essence of his study here.[169]

The Difference between Islam and Islamic Thought

From the outset, we need to clarify what is meant by Islamic thought. Islamic thought is not Islam; it is the intellectual product of Muslims that aims to serve Islam by deliberating on its principles. Islam is the divine revelation inspired to the Prophet of Allah, Muhammad ibn 'Abdallah (SAW). The book of this prophetic mission is the Noble *Qur'an*. Its authority is consolidated by the confirmed practices of the Prophet (SAW), which also clarify whatever needs clarification.

Islamic thought is created; it submits to the laws of growth and development and is subject to corruption. Islam, on the other hand, has a book that is incorruptible: “**Falsehood cannot come to it from before it or behind it; (it is) sent down by the All-Wise, (who is) worthy of all praise” (Q. 41: 42)**. Islamic thought is not protected from error and weakness. Islam, however, is protected. The Book of Islam - because it is protected from deviation and frailty - is of divine

[168] There have been a number of translations of *al-Muqaddimah* into English. The most famous of these is probably Franz Rosenthal's (1958) three volume version: *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History. Pantheon / Bollingen*. Rosenthal's translation is available online at http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ik/Muqaddimah/ [Translator].

[169] He presented this study at Egypt's Ministry of Endowments in a lecture delivered at the invitation of the Culture Ministry. A few additions and slight changes in the presentation style have been made to suit the needs of the current book. In addition, care has been taken to be as faithful as possible to Ibn Khaldūn's work when quoting from it.

status and commands the absolute compliance of all believers. Islamic thought cannot demand compliance, except to the point that it is representative of Allah's Book and the Divine Message. This is because – by its very origin – it submits to criticism and difference in opinion.

The difference between Islam and Islamic thought is like the difference between that which is due to Allah and that which belongs to humanity. The relationship between the two concepts is like the bond between two objects: the one rests upon the other and depends upon it for its support and existence. However, one does not represent the other perfectly, nor is it an identical expression of it.

There is Islam, descended by divine revelation, and then there are Muslims that believe in Islam. They translate its teachings into action and are devoted to perpetuating these teachings amongst their generation as well as to the generations that follow, so that they remain devoted. They also teach their peers how to be devoted followers and how to express their faith in an acceptable way, as well as teaching them devotion to the perpetuation of Islam and to their own perpetuation as a nation of believers. Preparing the manner of these teachings, as well as defining their characteristics and then expressing them in a manner that is passed on from generation to generation via the circulation of books, etc., is what is called Islamic thought. These methods – whether planning, defining important characteristics, or expression – vary, depending upon the person, the era, and the surrounding context. Differences around this variation may be to a greater or lesser degree.

Ibn Khaldūn relates the following in his *al-Muqaddimah* concerning the science of jurisprudence (*fiqh*):

> *Fiqh* is knowledge of the rulings of Allah, the Sublime, pertaining to the actions of subjects in relation to obligation *(al-wujūb)*, jeopardy *(al-khaṭr)*, recommendation *(an-nadb)*, detestation *(al-kirāhiyyah)*, and permissibility *(al-ibāḥah)*. It is derived from the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*, and proof-methods set up by the Legislator for this purpose. When rulings are derived from the above mentioned sources, they are described as *fiqh*.
>
> Our righteous predecessors derived rulings by this method even if it resulted in differences amongst them. Difference in opinion had to occur because most of the evidential material is textual and in the Arabic language. It is well-known that there exist differences of opinion on many of the linguistic terms of expression. The *Sunnah*, as well, has various chains of

> narration and means of verification. In many instances, its rulings conflict with one another. Giving preference to one ruling over another is therefore required and there even exists differences of opinion on how this should be done.
>
> There also exists difference in opinion regarding proofs derived from non-textual sources, as well as new developments that are not treated exhaustively by the texts. The unclear text is verified by the clear text when there is some similarity between them. All of the above are but indications of differences in opinion that occur as a necessity. From here on, differences occurred between the predecessors and the scholars that came after them.[170]

In this way, Ibn Khaldūn related what he called "indications of differences in opinion" on one of the many aspects of Islamic thought. This aspect, i.e. *fiqh*, is the least prone to differences in opinion because it is so strongly bound to the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. However, this does not exclude it from being regarded as human thought within the sphere of Islam. The sphere of Islam, or of any other religion, does not transform on its own, without divergence in human thought. As long as there is human thought and human intellectual output, there will always be divergence – sometimes extreme – attached to it or very close to it. Because of this divergence in Islamic thought, no opinion (of a single scholar or a handful of scholars) is expressive of Islam in a perfect manner. Islam will always remain a blessing from heaven and Islamic thought will always remain the product of people in the Muslim world; whosoever takes Islamic thought for Islam takes various different islams for Allah's single religion.

The Genesis of Islamic Thought after the Emergence of Islam and the Elements that led to its Development

Being the intellectual product of the Muslim individual, Islamic thought was generated after the revelation of the *Qur'an* and its explication by the *Sunnah*. The elements that prompted the development of Islamic thought cannot be restricted, for example, to the nature of the Qur'anic text or the authentication of *ḥadīth* from the perspective of the chain of narrators. It goes beyond these questions, and even goes beyond the issue of the rise of the Islamic State and the spread of Muslims to countries of different culture and material civilization. Therefore, it is only natural that there would be some interaction between the new religion and ancient cultures, whether through accepting certain elements or rejecting others, or through elements that stimulate deep

[170] *Al-Muqaddimah*, p. 372 (All page numbers make reference to the edition printed by *al-Matba'ah al-Amīriyyah*).

introspection leading to the legitimation of certain issues or the rejection of others, or, more generally, through anything that stimulates intellectual engagement and challenge.

Islamic thought thus came into being as soon as the Arab Muslims – who were its original bearers – began to produce scholars and artisans. Among Arabs, it stimulated a sense of discernment and contemplation as soon as it was initiated, whereas they had previously been content to restrict themselves to approaching only the *Qur'an* and the Prophetic tradition.

Ibn Khaldūn explains this early development of Islamic thought is his *al-Muqaddimah* thus: The Muslim community initially lacked academic or vocational qualities due to their simplicity and nomadic nature. The Islamic legal rulings – which are the commands and prohibitions of Allah – were carried by men through memorisation and were spread in a similar manner. The outlook of the people was shaped by the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah,* as received from the Prophet and his companions.

> The Arabs of that time were not very familiar with formal education, writing or codification. They were neither inclined towards these pursuits nor felt the need to acquire them out of necessity. Things remained this way through the era of the companions (*as-saḥābah*) and the era of the followers of the companions (*at-tābi'īn*). Those that did acquire and propagate such skills were referred to as The Readers (*al-Qurrā'*), i.e., those that read the *Qur'an* and were not illiterate. In those days illiteracy was a general characteristic amongst the companions, who were mostly Arabs. The compilers of the *Qur'an* were referred to as *al-Qurrā'* to indicate their skills. The title was used to refer to readers of the *Qur'an* and the transmitted prophetic traditions because they developed knowledge of the legislative rulings of Islam from these two sources only. These rulings were, at most, an explanation or commentary on these sources.
>
> The Prophet (SAW) said: **"I have left you with two things which, if you hold on to them firmly, you will not go astray. [They are] the Book of Allah (the *Qur'an*) and my Sunnah (i.e. the exemplary practice of the Prophet)."**[171] After the passing of the rule of the Righteous Caliphs (i.e. the first four caliphs of Islam) the community became distanced from the transmitted traditions. There was, therefore, a need to produce commentaries on the *Qur'an* and to gather the *ḥadīth,* out of fear that the latter may be lost. As a result, there was also a need to have knowledge of the chain of transmitters of the *ḥadīth* as well as to be able to appraise the narrators and critique them, so as to be able to differentiate between authentic

[171] *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ*, critically appraised by al-Albānī, ḥadīth no. 184.

> and suspicious narrations. Thereafter, there was a noticeable increase in the derivation of legal rulings from the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*.
>
> All the legal sciences fell under the domain of derivation, extraction, theorisation and analogy. There was also a need for other sciences that served the legal sciences, for example, having knowledge of the rules of the Arabic language and the rules pertaining to proof-extraction and analogy. Due to the proliferation of religious innovations and disbelief, the doctrines of faith also needed to be defended using such proofs. All of these sciences thus became necessary tools that needed to be learnt, and therefore became professional vocations.
>
> As far as the rational sciences (such as philosophy) are concerned, their manifestation in the community is only noticed after the appearance of scholars and writers and once the pursuit of knowledge had been established as a vocational practice.[172]

Some may argue that this manner of development in the Islamic community was not Islamic thought but was, rather, transmission and emulation of the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*. The sciences that represent this tradition are, they would argue, transmitted sciences and not knowledge that is founded upon intellectual production. However, this is not the case. We do not derive from Islamic thought an exclusively human element. That is why we prefix the description "Islamic" to it. It therefore includes transmitted Islamic elements out of necessity, in addition to the purely human intellectual elements that accompany it. That which is referred to as the "transmitted sciences" is not intended to exclude human intellectual activity or human thought processes; it simply means that it is not exclusively a product of human intellectual striving alone.

Ibn Khaldūn clarifies this in his *Muqaddimah*:

> Take note that the sciences taken up and propagated by people in all regions, whether through acquisition or study, are of two types:
>
> 1. The type that comes naturally to humans and to which one is guided by reflection or thinking; and
> 2. The type that is transmitted, taken from whoever imparts it.

[172] *Al-Muqaddimah*, pp. 477-479.

> *The First Type*: These are the rational or philosophical sciences, which people acquire through the natural dispensation of their minds and are guided to its subject-matter and specific issues through human perception and awareness. Through investigating proofs and exploring various facets of study, a person's research and insight lead him to that which is correct and he is, from this perspective, a rational being.
>
> *The Second Type*: These are the transmitted or established sciences. They are all based upon the enunciations of the legitimate transmitter (God or The Prophet). There is no room in this category for rational speculation except by way of linking peripheral issues with universal principles because these particular issues do not fall under the transmitted universals when plainly expressed (by the Legislator), and therefore need to be linked to it by means of analogy. However, this analogy is derived from the account where the ruling is established in the origin, which is already established by transmission.[173]

Therefore, the transmitted sciences incorporate rational exertion and human thought processes, but are based upon and linked to that which is transmitted and is not completely independent.

Regarding the transmitted sciences prevalent in the Islamic community, Ibn Khaldūn states:

> The foundation of all of these transmitted sciences is that which is legislated in the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*, i.e. which is legitimated for us by Allah and His Prophet, as well as the sciences associated therewith, which act to facilitate deriving of benefit from them. The categories of these transmitted sciences are many because the believer is obligated to know the laws that Allah has made compulsory upon him and his community; these are derived from the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, either literally, by consensus (*ijmā'*), or through association.
>
> 1. Firstly, it is necessary to ponder over the *Qur'an* so as to clearly understand its expression. This leads to the *Science of Tafsīr* (interpretation or explanation).
>
> 2. One must then examine the chain of narrators leading back to the Prophet (SAW), who has brought it to us from Allah, in addition to examining the narrations pertaining to the various reciters and recitations. This leads to the *Science of Qirā'a* (recitation).
>
> 3. Thereafter, one must examine narrations pertaining to prophetic utterances and their link to the Prophet himself. One must also discuss the narrators and their backgrounds to establish their impartiality and to have an informed opinion on their reliability, so as to

[173] *Al-Muqaddimah*, p 364.

be able to enact what they transmit. This leads to the *Sciences of Ḥadīth* (Prophetic traditions).

4. Then, one must be able to derive legal rulings (the rulings made obligatory by Allah) from their sources in a legitimate manner that reflects knowledge of proof derivation. This leads to the *Science of Usūl al-Fiqh* (legal source methodology).

5. Thereafter, one attains the fruits of knowing the laws of Allah pertaining to the actions of those who submit in faith. This leads to the *Science of Fiqh* (jurisprudence).

6. Religious obligation, then, is both physical and spiritual. The latter is concerned with faith and what is obligatory belief. This is the *Science of al-'Aqā'id al-Imāniyyah* (the doctrines of faith), concerning the essence and characteristics of Allah, resurrection, reward, punishment, and predestination. Argumentation concerning these rational proofs leads to the *Science of 'Ilm al-Kalām* (dialectic theology).[174]

These are the subjects of authentic Islamic thought dealt with by Muslims and which formed the platform for their intellectual activities in terms of the extraction and provision of proof. The subject matter is transmitted (*naqlī*), but expounded upon by the rational or intellectual activity of the Muslim scholar. Authentic Islamic thought thus emerged and developed, reaching a particular juncture that we will now discuss.

Muslims were compelled to create the science of *tafsīr* (exegesis) and, as such, they "explained the *Qur'an*, firstly, by the use of narrations that were derived from the transmitted corpus of the earlier scholars. These narrations dealt with scholarship on the abrogated and abrogating verses (*an-nāsikh wa al-mansūkh*), the occasions of revelation (*asbāb an-nuzūl*), and the aims and objectives of revelation (*maqāsid al-āyāt*)."[175] Exegesis by way of narrated reports – as stated by Ibn Khaldūn – included "what was inferior and what was enriching as well as what was acceptable and what was contemptible."[176]

A second type of exegesis was influenced by a specific form of sectarianism, in exegetical works like *al-Kashshāf* (The Exposition) by az-Zamakhsharī and *al-Kibriyāt al-Aḥmar* (The Red Sulphur), by Muḥyī ad-Dīn ibn 'Arabī. The opinions expressed in *al-Kashshāf* represent the

[174] *Al-Muqaddimah*, p. 364.
[175] ibid.
[176] ibid.

Mu'tazilī School. The opinions in *al-Kibriyāt al-Aḥmar* represent the views of the later sufis (mystics) specifically pertaining to the issues of Transfiguration (*at-tajallī*), immanence (*al-ḥulūl*), and unity of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*).

Muslims were compelled to create the science of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) due to the requirements of political and social life, the expansion of the Islamic State and the embracing of Islam by people from different religions and cultures. *Fiqh* is defined as the study of the laws of Allah pertaining to the actions of the believers. The most famous schools of *Fiqh,* which represent the majority of Muslims, are as follows:

1. The School of opinion and analogy (*Madhhab ahl ar-ra'y wa al-qiyās*). This school originated amongst the people of Iraq, who followed and mastered analogy because of the scarcity of transmitted prophetic traditions in this region. This is why they are referred to as 'People of opinion'. Foremost within this group was Abū Hanīfah and his companions.

2. The School of tradition (*ahl al-ḥadīth*). This school originated amongst the people of *Ḥijāz* (the region of Makkah and Madinah). Foremost amongst them was Mālik ibn Anas al-Aṣbaḥī, the Imām of Madinah (the city is also known as *Dār al-Hijrah* because it was the place to which the Prophet (SAW) and his early Muslim community migrated to after being persecuted in Makkah). After him came Muhammad ibn Idrīs ash-Shāfi'ī who conflated the jurisprudence of the people of Madinah with that of the people of Iraq, after having travelled to the latter region.

3. The Literalist School (*Madhhab aẓ-Ẓāhiriyyīn*). The foremost scholars of this school were Dāwūd ibn 'Ali and his son. Their school is founded upon the denial of analogy and the refutation of its usage. "They restrict everything that can be perceived to the texts (of the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*) and to consensus (*ijmā'*). They link any apparent analogy (*al-qiyās al-jalī*) and its underlying textual motive (*al-'illah al-mansūsah*) to the text, because a text with a clear motive (*al-'illah*), they argue, is a text that indicates a ruling in all possible fields of application."[177]

[177] *Al-Muqaddimah*, p. 372.

4. Together with these schools of jurisprudence, which are associated with the majority of Muslims, one finds another unique school associated with the *ahl al-Bayt* – i.e. the Shī'ah. This school is founded upon belief in the Infallible Imām.

5. There is also a school of *fiqh* associated with the *Khawārij* sect. When deriving rulings from the primary texts, they take into consideration their unique position on leadership and the duties of the leader towards his followers, in addition to the obligations of the followers towards the leader.

Muslims were also compelled to create the science of *usūl al-fiqh* (legal source methodology) alongside *fiqh*. *Usūl al-fiqh* entails inquiring into juridical proofs, since they serve as the basis for deriving laws and obligatory actions.

As Ibn Khaldūn explains, the creation of this discipline was essential:

> Know that this is one of the disciplines that was invented and specially created by the Muslim community. The predecessors were in no need of it because the meanings of various expressions were within their grasp, due to their highly developed linguistic capabilities. They were also not in need of the rules or principles required to derive laws specifically, because most of these laws have come down to us from them. They were also not in need of the chain of narrators in order to assess the validity of transmitted accounts, or accounts of the narrators themselves pertaining to their knowledge, because these accounts were narrated in their era. Once the early predecessors had died out and the first generation vanished and the sciences had become vocational pursuits – as has been explained earlier – scholars and jurists came to be in need of such rules and principles to derive laws from existing sources. They, therefore, recorded these principles, thereby establishing an independent science, which they named *Usūl al-Fiqh*.[178]

Muslims were also compelled to defend the Islamic faith – when it was overwhelmed and attacked by other faiths and beliefs – and they therefore created the science of *kalām* (dialectic theology): "The subject matter of the science of *kalām* – according to its proponents – deals with the doctrines of faith after they have been made obligatory in a correct manner by the Law, in that

[178] *Al-Muqaddimah*, p. 379.

rational proofs are also sought to defend these doctrines. In this way, the doctrines of faith are disassociated from any innovations and doubt or uncertainty that may surround them."[179]

Therefore, *tafsīr, fiqh, usūl al-fiqh* and *'ilm al-kalām* capture the various facets of authentic Islamic thought. They were created out of necessity, and as a consequence of the pressures under which Muslims lived at that time, in different regions and generations, and to bridge a chasm in the life of the Islamic community or to defend against accusations or speculation cast at the face of Islam. These sciences represent authentic Islamic thought because they spring forth from Islam itself and branch out from where Muslims applied their minds. No matter how different the ideas of Muslims may be when branching out from Islam, their differences have not forced the majority of them to sever their link with Islam or to show intolerance to those who think differently.

The Principle of "Movement" in Islamic Thought and its Effects

"Movement" results from the fact that the thought of all Muslim scholars emanates from a single principle: whosoever applies his mind and reaches a correct judgement is rewarded twofold, and whosoever applies his mind and errs is rewarded a single reward only.[180] Everyone is rewarded because they all strive towards the truth, taking every precaution in order to extract it. Every one of these scholars also tries to be a Muslim in faith as well as in action. *Ijtihād* (mental exertion) is not only an expression of a Muslim's vitality towards Islam and life, or an expression of the ability that a Muslim possesses to continuously reconcile the life he lives here and now – or in the future – with the Islam that he believes in; it is also an expression of the spirit of ease and freedom of thought, even if this is a limited freedom.

The principle of *ijtihād*, upon which authentic Islamic thought is founded, is a principle of construction, of movement, of freedom, and, as a result, of facilitation and ease. At the same time, it is also a principle of purity and tolerance because the personal antagonism that results from intense intellectual antagonism has no place amongst the practitioners of *ijtihād* in Islam. It does, however, happen that when compulsion and strict compliance are enforced by some of the legal schools, they are judged to be backward and not completely judicious. Therefore, when authentic Islamic thought is initiated on the basis of unadulterated and free *ijtihād*, we find that the character of this thought is honesty and progress. We are hardly able to detect antagonism or

[179] ibid., p. 389.
[180] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Holding Fast to the Book of Allah and the Prophetic Practice, ḥadīth no. 6805.

disputation that goes beyond the spirit of sane inquiry between adversaries engaging on a subject or issue. In terms of the various ways in which they reasoned, we find that the Muslims of that era were people of opinion, knowledge and proof.

Ibn Khaldūn states:

> Indeed, these Transmitted Religious Sciences were pursued vigorously in the Muslim community, reaching a point where no more could be added, the intellectual capacities of the scholars having reached the extreme limit, beyond which nothing new could be found. All terminology was perfected and the various disciplines had been classified. They were only improved beyond this point in terms of excellent exposition and literary embellishment. Every discipline thus had an authoritative spokesperson that was invoked and conditions under which knowledge production had benefited from.[181]

The Growth of Islamic Thought

However, the growth of authentic Islamic thought did not continue in the direction it had initially followed, and was, within a short space of time, no longer accompanied along its path by the principle of "movement", i.e., *ijtihād*. In fact, it took another turn, towards foreign ideas that penetrated the Islamic community in the era of the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mūn. From then onwards, this foreign element imposed itself upon Islamic intellectual life. Thus, less attention was paid to *ijtihād*, and its influence within Islamic thought was diminished. With these two factors together, Islam was no longer the only source of Islamic thought, as it was now also influenced – lamentably – by this foreign element. In addition, its progress slowed down to the point where growth could hardly be discerned.

With the introduction of foreign thought elements into Islamic thought, the intellectual orientations and various philosophies within the Islamic community were injected with different incentives and objectives. New tendencies were added to the gruelling intellectual tendencies of the past, which very rarely concurred with and were, in most cases, in opposition or even contradictory to the established tendencies. The sciences of logic, metaphysics, biology and illuminative asceticism were introduced to the Islamic community after the translation of the pagan philosophical thought of the Greeks and the illuminative religious tradition of the East.

[181] *Al-Muqaddimah*, p. 364.

In this period, the disciplines of mysticism (*taṣawwuf*), magic (*siḥr*), talismanry (*al-ṭalmisāt*) and numerology (*asrār al-ḥurūf*) were innovated as well. These disciplines, which were transmitted or innovated in the Islamic community, did not remain isolated, and managed to infiltrate the religious sciences of authentic Islamic thought as well.

Ibn Khaldūn gives a summary description of these disciplines and their effects:

> Islamic scholars dedicated themselves to the pursuit of these sciences and mastered their disciplines, excelling in them and even rejecting many of the opinions of "The First Teacher," Aristotle. They paid special attention to either affirming or rejecting his views because of his fame, and, as a result, much was written in this regard. They even surpassed their predecessors in these sciences. Abū Nāṣr al-Fārābī was one of the most accomplished of such scholars amongst the Muslims of the fourth century (A.H), during the reign of Sayf ad-Dawlah. Abū 'Ali ibn Sīnā gained fame in the East in the fifth century (A.H), in the reign of Niẓām al-Mulk of the Bani Buwayyhi from Isfaḥān. Also worthy of mention, due to their fame, are the judge Abū al-Walīd ibn Rushd and the minister Abū Bakr ibn as-Sā'igh of *al-Andalus* (Spain), in addition to many others who also excelled. Many restricted themselves to taking up alchemy and its related disciplines like astrology, magic and talismanry. In these professions, Musallamah ibn Aḥmad al-Majrītī of *al-Andalus* (Spain) and his students were the most famous.
>
> Foreign elements entered the Muslim community through these sciences and their practitioners. Many people were seduced by inclining towards them and through blindly following their opinions. Blame only falls upon the indulgent, and if Allah had so wished, they would not have indulged in these practices.[182]

The corpus of authentic Islamic thought, represented by *tafsīr, fiqh, usūl al-fiqh* and *'ilm al-kalām*, did not escape the influence of these translated and innovated sciences after they became available in Arabic. The exegetical work *al-Kashshaf* by az-Zamakhsharī, who was a Mu'tazilite, was influenced by Mu'tazilite methodology and thought. The Mu'tazilī School was influenced by Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thought in its development, especially on the issues of *tawḥīd* (unity – especially the unity of God) and the problem of the Divine Attributes. The exegesis of Muḥyī ad-Dīn ibn 'Arabī – as has been mentioned – was influenced by Brahmin philosophy on the issue of unity of being and by Christian philosophy on the issue of the incarnation of the divine in the

[182] *Al-Muqaddimah*, p. 401.

human. This was in addition to the views of Ibn Sīnā, the *Ikhwān as-Ṣafā* (the Brethren of Purity), and other extremists who fell under the spell of foreign thought.

After the translation of works on asceticism and eastern mysticism, Islamic jurisprudence had to compete against Islamic mysticism. While Islamic jurisprudence remained committed to the human comprehension of the texts of the *Sharī'ah* in gaining knowledge of the rulings pertaining to the actions of the believers, Islamic mysticism relied upon *adh-dhawq* (personal spiritual inclination) and *muḥāsabah an-nafs* (self-accountability) as a source of knowledge after *imān* (belief).

Human actions thus came to be judged by two standards: occasionally by the standard of juristic rulings pertaining to rituals, customs and conduct, and, at other times, by the standard of personal spiritual inclination and self-accountability. This contestation developed into antagonism and hostility. Al-Ghazālī, who is a representative of the intermediate stage in the development of Islamic mysticism, said:

> The guides along the path are the scholars who are the heirs of the prophets, whose time has passed; all that is left are those that follow in their footsteps. Now, everyone seems to hasten his fate as if enchanted, and what is good is seen as abhorrent, and what is abhorrent is seen as good.
>
> Even the science of religion has been obliterated and the torch of guidance in the various lands has been extinguished. People thus seem to think that there is no knowledge except what is expressed in the legal directives of a government and upon which judges rely to settle disputes when dissension is sewn amongst the populace, or what arises out of disputation advanced as an argument by someone boastful in order to refute another opinion, or rhymed prose employed by preachers to entice the masses. They do not regard anything except these three as a snare for that which is prohibited and as a net for rubble.
>
> The science of the path of the Hereafter – i.e. spiritual exercise (*ar-Riyāḍah an-Nafsīyyah*) – and that which was practised by the pious predecessors and has been described by Allah, the Most Sublime, in His Book as understanding, wisdom, knowledge, illumination, light, guidance and uprighteousness, has been ignored by people and has been almost forgotten.[183]

[183] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn,* vol. 1, page 2.

In spite of this, hostilities did not reach the point of enmity and dogmatism because the science of mysticism – until today – has not reached the zenith of its development. Most of its elements are Islamic, but it is distinguished by what is known as striving against the self and self-accountability. Ibn Khaldūn describes it in the following manner:

> The active and engaging soul in the body arises out of perceptions, desires and circumstances, and this is what characterises the person. Some of these elements arise out of others, just as knowledge arises out of proof, and joy and sadness out of feeling pain or pleasure, or vitality out of striving, or laziness out of incapacity. In a similar manner, the *murīd* (Sufi initiate), in his rituals and spiritual striving, brings about a certain state as a result of his striving. The *murīd* continues to ascend from one level to the next, until he achieves union with the divine (*at-tawḥīd*) and knowledge (*al-ma'rifah*), which is the sought-after-goal to achieve happiness. It is essential that the *murīd* ascends through these stages. Its basis is complete obedience and sincerity, which is preceded and accompanied by faith. It is from these states and characteristics that results and fruits are borne.
>
> Thereafter, other stations (*maqāmāt*) arise until the seeker reaches the station of union with the divine (*at-tawḥīd*) and gnosis (*al-'irfān*), spiritual knowledge and insight. If some change occurs in the expected outcome, or some blemish is manifest, we then know that it is a result of shortcomings in the effort prior to it. This applies to the state of self-consciousness and the emotions of the heart as well. For this reason, the *murīd* requires self-accountability in all of his actions and has to consider their realities. It is inevitable that results arise out of actions and that shortcomings are a result of laxity. The *murīd* is able to find personal flaws by his spiritual sense (*adh-dhawq*) and is able to make himself accountable for their manifestation. Only a few people have this ability. It is as if unawareness of this is all-encompassing.
>
> The objective of the people of worship (*ahl al-'ibādāt*) (i.e. those that heed the teachings of *fiqh*), is to approach good deeds exclusively from the perspective of jurisprudence, in compliance with its detailed expositions. The *murīds*, in contrast, search for outcomes by means of spiritual sense and emotion so as to know that they are, in essence, free of any shortcomings. It is thus apparent that the basis of the *murīd*-method is self-accountability in terms of action and abstention. This is followed by deliberation on the spiritual senses and emotions that are acquired through striving, and which settle within the *murīd* initially and thereafter passes on to others.
>
> In addition to this, they also have certain customary practices and terminology that is specific to them. They have, thus, specialised in this type of knowledge, since no one else from

> amongst the people of the *sharī'ah* is proficient in it. The science of *sharī'ah* thus became divided into two categories. The first category pertains specifically to the jurists and jurisconsults (*ahl al-futya*), and deals with the general rulings of rituals, customs, and conduct. The second category pertains to the mystics, who are practitioners of striving and self-accountability, who deliberate on the spiritual senses and emotions encountered along the path, and on how to ascend from one experience to the next, and who explain the terminology that they employ.
>
> When the sciences began to be recorded and codified, and jurists began writing on *fiqh, usūl al-fiqh, al-kalām, tafsīr*, etc., mystics also started writing about their paths and practices. Some of them wrote on piety and self-accountability in terms of abstention and permissibility, as was done by al-Qushāyrī in the book *ar-Risālah* and by as-Suhrawardī in the book *'Awārif al-Ma'ārif*, in addition to many others. Al-Ghazālī brought *fiqh* and mysticism together in his book *Iḥyā Ulūm ad-Dīn*. In it he recorded the rules pertaining to piety and emulation and then clarified the customs of the mystics and their traditions, in addition to explaining their terminology in their words.
>
> The science of mysticism (*at-taṣawwuf*) thus became a codified discipline, whereas, prior to this, the only way was worship (i.e. the way of jurisprudence). Its rulings were received from "the hearts of Men" (i.e. from the lived experiences transmitted by scholars), as was the case with the other sciences that were eventually codified by means of writing, such as *tafsīr, ḥadīth, fiqh* and *usūl al-fiqh*.[184]

Islamic dialectic theology (*'ilm al-kalām al-Islāmī*) was – in comparison to other trends in authentic Islamic thought – strongly influenced by and the most engaged with the corpus of foreign thought transmitted into Arabic. Ibn Khaldūn states:

> The later scholars wrote on the sciences of the people of their times and al-Ghazālī refuted much of what was written. Thereafter, the later dialectic scholars (*al-mutakallimūn*) conflated many of the issues pertaining to dialectic theology (*'ilm al-kalām*) with issues of philosophy – as these were prevalent in their inquiries – so the subject-matter of dialectic theology resembled philosophy and their inquiries resembled each other as well. They thus appeared to be a single discipline. Dialectic theology was also conflated with the concerns of the aphoristic science (*al-ḥikmah*) and its books were filled with aphorisms. It was as if the objective and concerns of the subject were the same, and this was confusing to people. This is lamentable because dialectic theology is concerned with the doctrines of belief derived

[184] *Al-Muqaddimah*, p 391-392.

> from the *sharī'ah* as conveyed by the early generation, without having recourse to the intellect or relying upon it. Therefore, the suggestion that these doctrines are affirmed exclusively by the intellect is false.
>
> Indeed, the intellect is separate from the revealed law (*ash-shar'*) and its purview. That which is deliberated upon by the dialectic scholars concerning the provision of proof does not concern the search for truth in the divine law. Having recourse to evidence – to prove a fact that was not known to be factual – is the concern of philosophy. The methodology of dialectic theology, on the other hand, is to search for rational proofs that support the doctrines of faith and the teachings of the early generation and which repel the obscurity of the heretics (*ahl al-bid'*). This would occur after these doctrines had been, firstly, verified as correct according to transmitted proofs, as was received and accepted by the early generation, and which were then verified again from a rational perspective.

Ibn Khaldūn also states:

> The insight of the Legislator is far deeper because its frame of reference extends beyond the scrutiny of rational insight. The Legislator's insight is above rational insight and encompasses it, as it flows from the divine light and does not fall under the legislation of weak rational insight. So if the divine law (*ash-shar'*) guides us to a certain insight, we should give it precedence over our insights and show confidence in it. We should not attempt to adjust it by rational insight, even if it is seemingly contradictory.[185] In fact, we should rely upon that which we are obligated to, in terms of belief and through knowledge, and we should remain silent concerning whatever of it we do not understand, leaving the matter in the hands of the Legislator, and excusing the intellect from issuing judgement.… The remonstrations of the dialectic theologians seemed – after this conflation – to be instituting the search for a mean through the provision of rational proof, but this is not the case. Their efforts are no more than a refutation of the atheists, and what is sought is to establish the truth and make it known.[186]

In this manner, Ibn Khaldūn explained the extent of the difference between the method of the dialectic theologians and the method of the philosophers, the effect that this has had upon the worth of religious doctrines, as well as the way in which it has concealed the sources from which it is taken and given standing i.e., the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*. The negative effects of the foreign

[185] There is nothing in the Divine Legislation that contradicts Reason. What is intended here is anything whose underlying wisdom remains hidden to the mind, like some of the rituals of Hajj, for example.
[186] *Al-Muqaddimah*, p. 413 – 414.

thought elements translated into Arabic are not only restricted to turning Qur'anic exegesis in a direction opposed to its original orientation, nor to placing mysticism in competition against jurisprudence, nor to conflating the methods of the dialectic theologians with those of the philosophers. It, in fact, transcends all of this, and has created in jurisprudence a trend that is antagonistic to Islam, in addition to creating a similar trend in mysticism. This is due to the pagan philosophic elements conveyed in the foreign thought, in addition to Brahmin and Indian elements.

In its exposition of the reality of existence, this foreign thought brought with it the trinity of neo-Platonism, which holds that The First Cause (by which they mean God) is the origin of all of existence, then comes the intellect, and then the universal soul as existing matter, which is regarded as the basis and the highest example for everything in existence except itself. It brought with it this trinity – after having thrust it upon sacrosanct Christian beliefs prior to Islam – which brought about the well-known Christian belief in the trinity of God, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

This notion, which is foreign to Islam, also brought with it the belief of complete unity of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd ash-shāmilah*). It holds that whatever is in existence – no matter how profuse – is a manifestation of only one thing, and an extension of a singular existent, which is the cause and the origin, or the divine object of worship. This divine object of worship is the essence of existence and is manifest in all that is perceived to be, no matter how profuse and unending. It also brought with it the arrangement of existent matter as it sprung forth or emerged by means of emanation, as well as its contraction and return to the origin from which it had emanated. This idea is referred to as the "ascending disputation" and the "descending disputation" in the Alexandrian School. It resulted in the extremist trend in Shī'ah jurisprudence, amongst those who are referred to as the *Ismā'ilī*, *Bāṭinī*, *Tā'limī*, or the *Rāfiḍah*. Some of these groups came to be known as the *Qarāmitīyyah*, and others as the *Druze* or the *Ḥākimiyyīn* (in the Levant). A third group came to be known as the *Fāṭimiyyīn* or the *'Ubaydiyyīn* (in Egypt). A fourth group was known as the Companions of the Absolute Herald (*Asḥāb ad-Dā'ī al-Muṭlaq)* (in Yemen). A fifth group was the *Nazāriyyīn* (in India), with the Aga Khan as one of their leaders, and so forth.

The jurisprudence of these extremist Shī'ah groups is founded upon the belief in the trinity of Allah, Muhammad and the Imām, with the belief that the spirit of Allah is incarnated in the Imām, and he is therefore infallible in terms of his actions and pronouncements. The Imām's

pronouncement is regarded as authoritative in terms of Islamic law and is no less authoritative than the *Qur'an* and sometimes of a higher status because, by his pronouncement, some Qur'anic laws may be abrogated or suspended. As such, the jurisprudence of these extremist groups is based on the pronouncements of the Imām to a greater degree than upon the text of the *Qur'an*. Later groups, such as the *Imāmīyyah* and Twelver Shī'ah regarded these former groups as beyond the fold of Islam, and as rejecters of the faith, as is the view of the rest of the Muslim community.

These same developments also unfolded amongst the Sufis. The *taṣawwuf* that we alluded to earlier, i.e., the *taṣawwuf* founded upon obedience, faith, exertion and self-accountability, was transformed under the influence of this alien thought, leading to a predicament similar to that of the extremist Shī'ah. These Sufis also advocate a trinity consisting of Allah, Muhammad and the *Quṭb* (the Charismatic Leader). The spirit of Allah is incarnated in the *Quṭb,* who is therefore seen as infallible, and is absolved of religious obligation. His followers are consequently required to seek his intercession as he is also regarded as the centre of human salvation.

The influence of alien ideas from the extremist Shī'ah upon *taṣawwuf* was so pervasive that later Sufis adopted their belief in absolute unity (*al-waḥdah ash-shāmilah)* and divine manifestation (*at-tajallī*), which implies that these creatures are the essence of Allah, as is expressed in the saying: "I [Allah] was a hidden treasure and wanted to be known, so I created creation so as to know me."[187]

Concerning these later Sufis, Ibn Khaldūn said: "Then came the later extremist Sufis who also addressed issues of dialectic theology, and, thereby, conflated separate disciplines and, as such, addressed issues of prophecy, divine union, incarnation, unity of existence, etc."[188] He elaborates further:

> Later scholars focused their attention on unveiling the unseen and the consciousness behind it. The means of spiritual exercise in this regard differed according to the differences in their training to suppress the physical senses, and the sustenance of the intellectual spirit with *dhikr* (ritual recitation), until the soul attains an awareness from within its essence, through its proper nurturing and sustenance. If this is attained, these Sufis claim, existence is contained in the consciousness of the soul and they would unveil the essences of creation and would portray the reality of all things from the throne to the furniture. The consciousness of

[187] See note 189, below.
[188] *Al-Muqaddimah*, p. 441.

those who do not share their path is restricted and they are not able to understand their tastes and inclinations.

The jurisconsults are divided into those who reject these Sufis and those who affirm them. Proof and evidential statements do not benefit this path, whether to legitimate or to refute, as it is – according to their claim – a matter of emotional sentiment. Some writers try to clarify their positions pertaining to the unveiling of existence and the hierarchy of things. They only make matters even vaguer, in comparison to rational scholars who depend on evidence and use the terminology of the sciences. This vagueness is seen in the writing of al-Firghānī, the commentator on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *ad-Dibājah* (The Preamble), in the heart of the commentary itself. Concerning the emanations of existence and their sequence, emanating from the First Cause (*al-Fā'il*), he mentions that all of existence emanates from the characteristic of emotion, which is the form of singularity. Together, both of these emanate from nothing other than the Noble Essence, which is the essence of singularity, and this emanation is referred to as divine manifestation (*at-tajallī*).

The first level of manifestation, according to these Sufis, is the manifestation of the essence upon itself. It encompasses perfection and the emanation of creation and appearance. This is in regard to the prophetic utterance that they transmit: "I [Allah] was a hidden treasure and I wanted to be known, so I created creation so as to know me".[189] This perfection of the creation descended upon existence and the details pertaining to reality – which is the true existence according to them – takes the following order:

1. The world of meaning and the perfect presence;
2. The Muhammadan reality, which encompasses the reality of the attributes, the preserved tablet (*al-lawḥ*), the pen and the reality of all the prophets and messengers; and
3. The remainder of the followers of Muhammad's faith.

All of this explains the Muhammadan reality. Other realities emanate from these realities in the Glorious Presence, which are:

1. The symbolic level, then the throne, then the pedestal, then the planets;
2. Thereafter, the world of elements;
3. Thereafter comes the world of objects, and this is in the conjoined world, and if it is made manifest then it is in the separated world: **"The heavens and the earth were joined together as one united piece, then we parted them" (Q. 21: v. 30).**

[189] *As-Silsilāh aḍ-Ḍa'īfah*, al-Albānī, ḥadīth no. 6023. This is a very commonly invoked tradition by the Sufis but has no basis; this entire subject is unfamiliar to Islam and is not in anyway related to its obligatory or voluntary practices.

This school of thought is known as the school of the believers in the manifestation, the forms and the presences (*madhhab ahl at-tajallī wa al-maẓāhir wa al-ḥaḍarāt*). The followers of rational opinion cannot understand the import of these views, because of their vagueness. There is a vast gap between the followers of spiritual experience and emotion and the followers of evidential proof.

Similarly, others amongst them speak about unity and its branches. This view is closer to the first in terms of its attachments and branches. They accordingly claim that existence has a force, in its finer details, through which the realities of existent objects, their forms and substances are brought about. The elements are also a result of this innate force, as well as its matter, that has within it a force that brings about its existence. Thereafter, all objects have within them this force, encompassing the forces of their constituent components - like the force of minerals, which contains the forces of their primordial elements and the force of the mineral itself. Thereafter, the animal force encompasses the mineral force in addition to its own force. Similarly, the human force is combined with the animal force. The planets, thereafter, encompass the human force and all its additions, as well as the spiritual essences.

The all-encompassing force, without any elaboration, is the Divine Force, which circulates in everything in existence, in part or in full, and brings together and encompasses it all from every perspective, not only from the perspective of appearance, or the perspective of concealment, or from the perspective of the form or the perspective of matter. The collective is one and it is the same divine essence. It is also the reality – singular and simple, and the way it is apprehended is what explains it. This applies, for example, to humanness and animalness. Do you not see that animalness is a part of humanness and exists through it? It is sometimes expressed as the genus within the species in all that exists, as we have already mentioned. And, it is sometimes expressed with the whole and the part, as in symbolic expression.

By such explanations they flee from the composite and the plural, even though they have been obligated to accept such beliefs through speculation and imagination.

What is made manifest by Ibn Dahqān in his report of this school of thought is that the reality of what they speak of concerning unity is similar to what the philosophers say concerning colours: that their existence is dependent upon light and that if light is non-existent then colours cannot exist in any form. Similarly, according to them, the existence of all tactile objects depends upon the existence of the sense of touch and the existence of all rational or

> imagined objects depends upon the existence of the intellect. Therefore, preferred existence, all of it, is dependent upon the existence of the human subject.
>
> The later Sufis, those who concerned themselves with unveiling (*al-kashf*) and metaphysics, immersed themselves in this school of thought. Many became exponents of incarnation and unity of existence, as we have pointed out, and wrote extensively on these subjects, like al-Harawī in his book *al-Maqāmāt (The Ranks)*, and many others. They were followed by Ibn ʻArabī and Ibn Sabʻīn and their students, Ibn al-ʻAfīf, Ibn al-Fāriḍ and an-Najm al-Israʾīlī, who wrote poems on these issues.
>
> Their followers integrated with the later *Ismaʾīlīs* and *Rāfiḍah*, who also preached incarnation and the divinity of the Imāms, which was not known to their earlier scholars. Each of the two groups drew from the other's school of thought and their discourse was integrated, with many similarities appearing in their doctrines.
>
> The Sufi discourse started advocating the idea of the *Quṭb*, which is a reference to the head of the Gnostics. They claimed that it was not possible for anyone to reach his level of knowledge until Allah had taken his soul, after which another Gnostic would inherit his position. They then advocated the idea of the existence of a hierarchy of alternatives after this *Quṭb*, in a manner similar to the idea of the *Nuqabā* amongst the Shīʻah.[190]

The influence of disciplines transmitted from the outside increasingly impacted upon the Sufis. They were influenced – in addition to neo-Platonic, Brahmin and Indian thought – by the ideas of the Kaldanians and the Ashurites of Babel. In turn, they were influenced by the discipline of talismanry, which is a discipline dealing with the means and preparation of talismans that enable humans to be influenced by the world of elements, through invoking the help of the heavens.

They invented a discipline that came to be called "The Secret of the Alphabets". This discipline appeared in the Islamic tradition with the appearance of the extremist Sufis and their devotion to exposing the veil of the senses, including the performance of supernatural acts by their hands and delving into the world of elements, with the writing of books and the invention of terminology and with claims of the descending of existence from the One and its consequent ordering. They claimed that the perfection of the heavens are manifest in the souls of the planets and the stars and

[190] *Al-Muqaddimah*, pp. 392- 395. The Sufi discourse on these subjects vacillates between falsehoods and lies and has no relation to academic inquiry. It is extremely lamentable that this subject matter should occupy a place in our traditional heritage.

that the nature of the alphabet and its secrets are posted in the heavens and in creation according to this order. Creation is a shade of primary innovation that is transmitted in its spheres and gives expression to its secrets. For this reason, the discipline of the secrets of the alphabets was created. Al-Būnī, Ibn ʻArabī, and others have written on this. The import of their thought is that divine souls are able to effect changes in the natural world by invoking the beautiful names of the Creator and the divine words, which arise from the alphabets by secret and which are posted in all of creation. Their thought is based upon spiritual sensibility (*adh-dhawq*) and unveiling (*al-kashf*).

Al-Būnī states in his book *al-Anmāt (The Patterns)*: "Do not think that the secret of alphabets is a discipline that can be attained by analogical reasoning; it is reached by attaining witness (*al-mushāhadah*) and by Divine Grace. The actions of the companions of the heavens (upon nature) are as a result of what they have attained through earnest striving and through the unveiling from the divine light and through the divine extension. They are thereby able to manipulate nature voluntarily, without difficulty, and they do not require the intervention of planetary forces or anything else."[191]

Writings on magic were transmitted to the Arabic language by way of the ancient Babylonian culture and certain Muslim scholars – who were not from within the Sufi tradition – inclined towards it and wrote about it. Ibn Khaldūn states:

> The books of the Babylonians (the Assyrians and Kaldanians) were not translated for us. The Coptic people of Egypt accumulated some knowledge of the disciplines of magic and talismanry, such as accounts of the Nabataean farmers of Babel. People acquired this discipline from the Copts and further inquired into it. Thereafter, Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, the greatest Sorcerer of the Islamic tradition, appeared in the East. He studied the Babelian texts and distilled from them the discipline of chemistry. He wrote on this subject, and on many others, and discussed alchemy in detail because it was closely related to chemistry. Since the transformation of objects from one form to another is achieved through an inherent force in alchemy and not through practical industry, it is regarded as magic. Muslimah ibn Ahmad al-Majrītī appeared after him. He was the leading Andalusian scholar of mathematics and the sciences of magic. He summarised and refined all the extant works on the subject and

[191] *Al-Muqaddimah*, p. 423. This talk is all superstition that has been contrived by overindulging in delusion. Islam is absolved from it and those that busy themselves with it are impostors.

> integrated the different schools into his book, which he called *The Objective of the Wise (Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm)*; none have written on the subject after him.[192]

The Suspension of the Principle of "Movement" in Authentic Islamic Thought

Thus the influence of the transmitted philosophical sciences drove various trends within authentic Islamic thought. Alongside this fate – manifested in the above trends – we notice that this thought became afflicted by the inability to continue with constructive movement, as was the case at the beginning of its inception, reaching its height at the end of the third century after the Hijrah.

Authentic Islamic thought was afflicted by stagnation. With regard to deriving legal rulings and the understanding of texts, free thought was prohibited. By public opinion, Islamic jurisprudence culminated in the blind adherence to specific schools, except in the case of the *ahl al-Bayt* and the *Khawārij*. Jurisprudence became a secondary practice within the framework of the imitated school, and imitation was restricted to a specific school with no extension into other schools.

Ibn Khaldūn explains:

> When the splitting of terminology became widespread in the sciences, and short-sightedness impeded the process of free thought (*ijtihād*), and when it was feared that learning would be attributed to the unqualified whose opinion and religious commitment could not be vouchsafed, inability was proclaimed and people were advised to imitate the four Imāms in order to understand the *Sunnah*. People were warned against constantly changing their allegiance from one to another school of thought as this would lead to manipulation. Therefore, no Muslim was allowed to follow more than one school of thought. All that they were allowed to do was to transmit their schools of thought, and each adherent (*muqallid*) stuck to his specific school after its principles had been corrected and its chain of narration had been linked to the narrative account (*riwāyah*). There was no other output of jurisprudence and those who claimed freedom of thought in this era (the seventh century AH) were rejected and their opinions were not followed.[193]

By prohibiting exchange between the various schools, the divisions between them became more pronounced and the chasm between their adherents was consequently widened. According to Ibn

[192] *Al-Muqaddimah*, pp. 414-415. Chemistry is today a science that enjoys an established status as it is based on experimentation and observation. In ancient times it was a fake discipline concerned with transforming base elements into gold.
[193] *Al-Muqaddimah*, p. 374.

Khaldūn, "When the school of every Imām became a specific discipline for its followers with no recourse to free thought and analogical reasoning, they needed to theorise on issues by way of comparison and to differentiate between them when in doubt by taking recourse to predetermined principles developed in the school of their Imām. To be able to theorise and differentiate in this manner so as to comply with the school of their Imām required a firmly established aptitude. This aptitude became the science of jurisprudence of this era."[194]

If free thought had transformed into blind imitation and the aptitude to derive and extract rulings had transformed into emulation and conformity to the teachings of the Imām of a school, and if a barrier was created between a school's adherents and the capacity to test their school, it would be only a matter of time before the various schools of jurisprudence would become similar to separate religious traditions in terms of bigoted attachment and disputation amongst their adherents. This was, in fact, what transpired, leading to the creation of what became know as the Science of Disputation (*'ilm al-khilāfiyyāt*) in the Islamic community. This science is founded on debate amongst the various schools of thought that argue the merits of a certain school and the importance of adhering steadfastly to it.

Ibn Khaldūn explains:

> Know that there was much disputation amongst scholars over jurisprudence, which was derived from textual evidential material, and, due to differences in opinion and apprehension, disagreement was inevitable. This took on tremendous proportions in the faith community and there developed many schools of thought. Finally, the schools of thought of the four Imāms gained ascendancy due to their high regard and people constrained themselves to following one of these four schools and prohibited adherence to any other schools due to the decline of free thought (*ijtihād*) and the difficulties associated therewith.
>
> The disciplines within the four schools of thought multiplied with the passing of time and, due to the neglect of other schools, the principles of the faith community were established within these four schools. Differences also arose amongst adherents of the four schools due to diverse understandings of religious texts and differences concerning juristic principles. Debates were held in defence of the schools of the various Imāms and were based upon set principles and rules in which the adherent to a specific school would provide evidence in defence of the school he was devoted to and which he defended. This discipline came to be

[194] *Al-Muqaddimah*, p. 375.

known as disputation (*'ilm al-khilāfiyyāt*). Ibn as-Sa'āti has compiled everything related to the science of disputation in his compendium on the principles of jurisprudence, pointing out all the differences of opinion pertaining to each problem.[195]

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Islamic thought began with clearly defined features after the beginning of Islam, the establishment of the Muslim community, the founding of its state and the emergence of its civilisation. This thought set out along an authentic trajectory, guided by the *Qur'an* and the Prophetic tradition, after the requirements of everyday existence compelled it to seek such guidance and inspiration. It began establishing itself, guided simultaneously by the Islamic texts and human reason.

Islamic thought was required to respond to the changes brought about by the spread of Islam and the increasing demands placed upon it through increased contact between Muslims and other civilisations. The thinking of our early ancestors was informed by Islam and rational engagement. By this means, they were able to create a paradigm of Islamic thought which was unique to them, and, by expanding upon it, they reached great heights.

They were not motivated only by the requirements of everyday life in their efforts to create this paradigm, but also by their desires and aspirations. In addition to the requirements of everyday necessities, the sphere of Islamic thought also gave expression to political trends, as well as to questions of leadership.

The tensions in the systems of governance in the Islamic lands lamentably contributed to cultural chaos. Foreign thought found its way into the Arabic language, and Muslims began advocating it. This was due to Muslims seeking assistance from foreign ideas and their persistent exposure to these. Foreign thought had a visible influence upon authentic Islamic thought, as can be seen from:

1. Confusion in portraying the objectives and interpretive methods of the noble *Qur'an*;

2. Confusion in understanding the Prophetic tradition and its status, as well as attributing false statements to the Prophet (SAW);

[195] *Al-Muqaddimah*, p. 381.

3. Going beyond the set objectives of Islamic dialectic theology;

4. The withdrawal of certain jurisprudential and doctrinal schools from the sphere of Islam and its beliefs, like the extremist Shī'ah and Sufi groups;

5. The creation of the Sufism of the extremists, which became a competitor to jurisprudence, and which ultimately became hostile to it and to Islam in totality;

6. The creation of alternative disciplines of learning in the Muslim community, like the disciplines of magic, talismanry and the secret of the alphabets, which resulted in people turning away from the truth and its teachings, causing them to believe in baseless superstitions. Matters were made worse by the constant degeneration of authentic Islamic thought to the point where it lost its authenticity, and where intellectual stagnation weakened the foundation upon which it was constructed.

Having recourse to the religious texts became less common, and the invoking of the opinions of the Imāms of the various schools of thought became the norm. The principle of movement in Islamic thought (*ijtihād*) was suspended and was replaced by blind imitation (*taqlīd*). Islamic thought was, as such, incapacitated and frozen, and the *Qur'an* and Prophetic Tradition were forgotten.

Evaluation and appraisal were referred to the schools of thought; to the book of man and no longer to the book of God. Man thus enjoyed the infallible status of God in his pronouncements. The Islamic environment was polluted by countless superstitions and delusional claims, which quickly brought about its collapse. Islam was no longer the religion of principles that defined people; rather, piety became associated with people who pronounced their own principles. The religion of pure monotheism was no more and had become the religion of *unity of being,* of *intercession* and *intermediation*. The religion of the single community was no more and the *Ummah* had become sectarian, divided into a multitude of doctrinal schools.

Thereafter, the state was weakened, and collapsed, and central authority was passed on to the provinces, which further divided into independent principalities. Muslims divided into sects and every tribe proclaimed its own prince of the believers, with his own pulpit. When the Islamic

community weakened intellectually and spiritually, and when the bonds that held it together weakened, thereby weakening its unity, foreign forces were spurred on, the spirit of resistance was broken and the Muslim empire was stormed by the Tartars from the East and the Crusaders from the West. This was its position just before the seventh century AH.[196]

However, the earth was not emptied of those who stood as witnesses for Allah. Certainly not! Every era produced someone who put fear in the heart of the oppressor so as to set him on the straight path. There was always someone in our *Ummah* who stood against deviance if it appeared, who resisted it if it took root and who violently opposed it so that the flag of truth was raised and could take its place. The story of this gruelling intellectual struggle is a long one. To gain some insight into it, we recommend Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi's book, *Men of Intellect and Propagation in Islam*.[197]

[196] 13th Century CE [Translator].
[197] Shaykh al-Ghazālī makes reference to the Arabic translation of Nadwi's book, published as *Rijāl al-Fikr wa ad-D'awah fi al-Islām*. The original work was written in Urdu, entitled *Tarikhi Dawat-o-Azimat*. The book has also been translated into English, in four volumes, by Mohiuddin Ahmad, under the title *Saviours of Islamic Spirit* [Translator].

CHAPTER THREE: INNOVATION IN RELIGION

The perceptive scholar, familiar with the sources of Islam and its subdivisions, does not fail to notice the innovations that have been added to this religion. These innovations are not a part of Islam but totally blemish its purity, and damage its authenticity and image. Such innovations have been introduced by people who, thereby, make additions to that which Allah has legislated. We need to carefully consider this development from various perspectives. Why do people come forward with new things of their own doing, mixing them with Islam and thereby attempting to draw the sanctity of Islam onto these innovations? Do they see a deficiency in the teachings that Allah has revealed? If this is the motivation for their innovations then it is indeed great foolishness, because Allah, the Most High, says in His Book: **"This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion" (Q. 5: 3).**

Whoever thinks that there are shortcomings or deficiencies in the teachings of Islam, thereby warranting additions to discipline the self or bless the masses, is a disbelieving idiot. The majority of innovators most probably concoct inventions because of religious extremism and not because they find the religion deficient. Extremism - in any matter - leads to deviation from set objectives. In most instances, it causes one to lose track of reality and contributes to establishing falsehood. The extremism of the Christians resulted in them associating partners with Allah; others went to extremes by prohibiting that which was permissible. With regards to those before us, Allah, the Most High, says: **"O people of the scripture (Jews and Christians)! Do not exceed the limits in your religion nor say of Allah aught but the truth." (Q. 4: 171).** With regards to the believers, Allah states: **"O you who believe! Make not unlawful the good things which Allah has made lawful to you, and transgress not." (Q. 5: 87).** Allah then orders His righteous servants to strictly adhere to one path, without deviation. If they were to deviate, they would be misled: **"And this is the path of your Lord leading straight. We have detailed Our revelations for a people who take heed" (Q. 6: 126).**

The Prophet (SAW) has advocated the adherence to his *Sunnah* and the following of his example in many *aḥādīth*. Muslim narrates from Jābir ibn 'Abdallah: "Allah's Messenger (SAW) would

say in his sermon: **"The best of statements is (from) the Book of Allah and the best of guidance is the guidance of Muhammad. The worst of matters are innovations and all innovations are *bid'ah* (heresy) and all *bid'ah* leads to misguidance."**[198]

'Abdāllah ibn Mas'ūd narrates on the authority of the Prophet (SAW): **"Indeed they are two: speech and guidance. The best of speech is the speech of Allah and the best of guidance is the guidance of Muhammad. In spite of this, you will introduce innovations and innovations will be introduced for you; all innovations lead to misguidance and misguidance leads to the fire."**[199]

The forms of these despised innovations vary in degree and extent, and the harm and deviation resulting there-from vary as well. Scholars have rejected the most insignificant innovation, showing no laxity, because accepting even seemingly-insignificant innovations leads to widespread innovation in the fields of belief (*al-'aqā'id*), legislation (*al-aḥkām*), worship (*al-'ibādāt*), and behaviour (*al-akhlāq*). As the saying goes: "The majority of the inhabitants of the fire have entered due to small evils."

It is reported that a man sneezed next to 'Abdallah ibn 'Umar and said: "Praise be to Allah and blessings upon the Messenger of Allah!" 'Abdallah ibn 'Umar said to him: "That is not what the Messenger of Allah had taught us to say when we sneezed; he taught us to say only: 'Praise be to Allah.'"[200] Ibn 'Umar refused to keep silent regarding an addition that some see as being of no harm and took it upon himself to guide the man to comply with the boundaries set by the transmitted *Sunnah*, without adding or subtracting from it in the least. If the door to this addition was left open, extravagant individuals would have invented lengthy sayings to be recited by the one who sneezes, and even lengthier responses. Innovations surrounding these minor matters would then lead to innovations in matters of greater significance.

The one who innovates in matters of religion grants himself a position he is not entitled to. Allah, the Most Honoured and High, is the only Legislator. How can someone - no matter what his intention or his position - add to Allah's rulings things that he puts forward by his own initiative, saying that this is good and should be carried out or that this is detestable and should be ignored?

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[198] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Friday Prayer, ḥadīth no. 1435.
[199] *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, Introduction, ḥadīth no. 45.
[200] *Sunan at-Tirmidhī,* Book of Ethics, ḥadīth no. 2662.

Allah has not granted anyone such authority in His revelation, nor is it given any credence by the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW): **"Or have they partners with Allah, who have instituted for them a religion which Allah has not allowed? And had it not been for a decisive word (gone forth already), the matter would have been judged between them. And verily, for the wrongdoers there is a painful torment" (Q. 42: 21).** By encroaching upon this divine right, humankind transgresses upon its own restricted capacity and exceeds its own limits. For this reason, going along with this trend is regarded as associating other lords with Allah, thereby permitting what is prohibited, and prohibiting what is permissible.

ath-Tha'libī narrates the following from 'Adī ibn Ḥātim: "I came to Allah's Messenger (SAW) wearing a cross made of gold around my neck. He said: **'O 'Adī, expel the idol that is on you.'** I heard him then reciting: **'They (the Jews and Christians) took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords besides Allah' (Q. 9: 31).** I said: 'O Messenger of Allah, they do not worship them.' He said: **'Do they not prohibit that which Allah has made permissible and make permissible that which Allah has prohibited?'** I said: 'Yes, they do.' He then said: **'That is their worship.'**"[201]

Referring to this verse (Q. 9: 31) that the Prophet (SAW) recited, al-Alūsī said: "The verse points to many of the deviant sects that ignore Allah's Book and the *Sunnah* of His Prophet (SAW) in favour of the statements of their scholars and leaders." Only the truth deserves to be followed, and when it is made apparent, all Muslims are obligated to follow. There is no doubt that adding to the religion reflects an inclination towards vanity, and abandoning the truth results in deviation from the path: **"So after the truth, what else can there be, save error? How then are you turned away?" (Q. 10: 32).**

Those that devise these innovations carry the burden of their own misguidance as well as the burdens of those that are fooled and respond to them, as is stated in the *ḥadīth*: **"Whoever established a bad practice shall be burdened with its burden as well as the burdens of those who act upon it."**[202] Allah, the Most High and Honoured, also states: **"They will bear their own burdens in full on the Day of Resurrection, and also of the burdens of those whom they misled without knowledge" (Q. 16: 25).**

[201] *Sunan at-Tirmidhī,* Book of Qur'anic Exegesis, ḥadīth no. 3020.
[202] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Alms, ḥadīth no. 1691.

Every act of worship occupies a place in the heart in which it descends and settles. These acts of worship also require an effort for them to be fulfilled. No man has two hearts and cannot exert any effort greater than that which he possesses and is characterised by. As a result, he cannot place himself between two positions; he either orientates himself with his heart and strength towards the *Sunnah*, or towards *bid'ah* (heretical innovation). Any activity in either of these two categories would be at the expense of the other category. Those that busy themselves with heretical innovations, regarding them lightly, inadvertently lose track of some of the realities and clear obligations of correct Islam, emphasizing these superstitions and being attracted by these innovations.

The danger of *bid'ah* is not only that it is a blemish that stains the face of authenticity; it is also a disease that causes religion to lose its health and weakens its heart and limbs. For this reason, Ibn Mas'ūd said: "Moderation with regards to the *Sunnah* is better than exercising an opinion that is based on innovation."[203] The Prophet (SAW) said: **"Any *bid'ah* introduced by people results in them losing an equivalent portion of the *Sunnah*."**[204]

Abū Dāwūd relates that Mu'ādh ibn Jabal once said: "Ahead of you lies discord in which there will be an abundance of wealth and the *Qur'an* will be opened and taken hold of by the believer and the hypocrite, men and women, young and old, freeman and slave. A person will almost say: 'Why do people not follow me, even though I have recited the *Qur'an*? They will not follow me until I innovate for them something other than the *Qur'an*!' So beware of innovation, because it is misguidance. I also warn you of the deviation of the wise, as Satan may utter a word of misguidance by the tongue of the wise and a hypocrite may utter a word of truth."[205]

Mu'ādh's words explain to us how people of religion – especially the Sūfis – construct prayers and *dhikr* (ritual invocations) for ordinary people just as an ignorant doctor dispenses bad medicine. This is then accepted by those who are fooled and they waste their time performing acts that have not been ordained by Allah, neither as an obligation nor as a voluntary practice. They forget the requirements of Islam (that serve to uplift their spirits and set aright their minds) to the extent that they occupy themselves with these innovated *adhkār* (pl. of *dhikr*).

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[203] *Sunan ad-Dārimī,* Introduction, ḥadīth no. 219.
[204] *Musnad Aḥmad*, ḥadīth no. 16356.
[205] *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, Book of Prophetic Practice, ḥadīth no. 3995.

Abū Dāwūd narrated that a man wrote to ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, asking him about predestination. ‘Umar replied: “I advise you to be heedful to Allah and to maintain frugality in carrying out His orders, to follow the *Sunnah* of his Prophet and to leave that which has been innovated after the establishment of the *Sunnah*. You should heed completely to the *Sunnah* because – with Allah’s permission – it is infallible. Know that people have not innovated any *bid‘ah* whose falsity cannot be proven. The *Sunnah* was established by one who knew of the errors that lie in rejecting it either deliberately or through ignorance and carelessness. So satisfy yourself with what people before you were content with as they possessed knowledge and insight; they were far more capable at resolving matters and were people of honour.”[206] The people of honour that are referred to by ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz were the Companions of the Prophet (SAW), who adhered to his word without the slightest deviation.

Some people are gifted with the ability to invent and originate. This is approved of and welcomed by Islam because the ability to innovate can be well utilized. It is welcome in worldly matters as it broadens the horizons of life. Westerners have exercised their ability in this field with great benefit and success. Instead of showing compliance in matters of religion and innovating in worldly matters, we have done exactly the opposite. In religious matters we have innovated meaningless things, and we have remained stagnant in worldly matters. People have flown between the heavens and earth but we still remain crawling on the ground. What would have been our state had we adhered to Allah’s revelation and shown innovation in matters relating to our intellects and worldly pursuits? Would this not have been better for our religion and more beneficial to our livelihood?

It is not permitted for a person – no matter how learned and experienced – to give credence to an action by placing upon it the characteristic of religion, allowing him to circulate it amongst people under the pretence that it is from the Lord of all creation, leaving the impression that carrying out this action results in reward or that ignoring it indicates shortcoming. This is the essence of falsehood, no matter what the intention of the person or the nature of the action that is introduced.

There are certain narrations that have been misunderstood. Some regard these narrations as giving approval for certain acts, encouraging their performance and describing them as acceptable devotions. For example, the Prophet (SAW) said: **“Whoever establishes a good action will have**

[206] *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, Book of Prophetic Tradition, ḥadīth no. 3996.

its reward and the reward of those who perform it, without having their reward reduced in any way."[207] Another example is the following statement attributed to the Prophet (SAW): "That which Muslims see as good is regarded by Allah as good."[208] The first *ḥadīth* is narrated by Muslim. It does not in any way suggest that innovation in religion is allowable, because there is no good action sanctioned by this religion that is not based upon the *Qur'an* or the prophetic practice. The first *ḥadīth* is similar to another statement of the Prophet (SAW): **"Whosoever invites to guidance will receive its reward and the reward of one who acts upon it, without detracting from their reward in any way."**[209]

Another example: **"One who points towards good is like one who does good."**[210] The guidance invited to is good actions, actions that Allah is pleased to see his servants follow. There is no guidance that is able to point out something that Allah has overlooked or a matter that the Prophet (SAW) may have forgotten! Yes, there may be guidelines that have a broad frame of implementation and that may be portrayed in different ways, thereby renewing methods of implementation with the passing of time. Such guidelines leave open the sphere for the innovation of methods and the viewing of concerns. This cannot be described as innovation in religion, or deviating from its established practice, even though it was not established by our predecessors; the requirements of their era did not call for this. A good action – after being settled – should be revelation from Allah or guidance from His Prophet, or an action in line with this orientation, drawing from this very same well-spring.

The narration which states "That which Muslims regard as good, is regarded as good by Allah" is not a *ḥadīth* of Allah's Messenger (SAW) but rather a statement of 'Abdallah ibn Mas'ūd. This respected Companion enjoys a high status in jurisprudence, which warrants us to welcome whatever he says. Ibn Mas'ūd, without doubt, did not intend to give the Muslim community permission to make additions or subtractions to their Book by this statement. He was the most sensitive of the companions in rejecting the infiltration of vain practices into general behaviour. He therefore took an extremely harsh position towards *bid'ah* and would expel it even if it concerned a minor matter, wrestling with any innovation from its inception, thereby extinguishing it at its origin. It would therefore be utter foolishness to suggest that the above-mentioned statement acts as evidence to allow innovation in matters of religion. Perhaps his statement is a

[207] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Alms, ḥadīth no. 1691.
[208] *as-Silsilāh aḍ-Ḍa'īfah*, al-Albānī, ḥadīth no. 533.
[209] *Sunan ad-Dārimī,* Introduction, ḥadīth no. 512.
[210] *Musnad Aḥmad*, ḥadīth no. 21326.

recommendation of some sort that was made in reference to the consensus (*ijmā'*) of the companions and those that follow them in righteousness, expressing the hope that they would not lose sight of any truth that is acceptable to Allah. It may even be referring to that which serves Islam and fulfils its major objectives, i.e., methods upon which the *Sharī'ah* has not placed any strict stipulations. Or perhaps it is a reference to general matters in which – from the perspective of Islam – only a good intention is a requirement.

Allowing additions to Islam under the pretence that they are good is the same as cancelling some of its teachings under the pretence that they are not beneficial or not suited to development; both scenarios are deviant and unacceptable. No one is allowed to ignore what Allah has legislated or to legislate what Allah has chosen to remain silent about, as is explained in the following *ḥadīth*: **"Allah has obligated the fulfilment of certain things so do not be neglectful of them; He has set certain boundaries so do not transgress them; He has prohibited certain things so do not violate (His prohibitions) and He has remained silent on certain things as a mercy to you and not out of forgetfulness, so do not inquire about them."**[211]

Mālik ibn Anas said: "Whoever regards a *bid'ah* as something good has suggested that Muhammad has betrayed his mission." Ash-Shāfi'ī said: "Even if I saw an innovator walking on air, I would not accept (his *bid'ah*)." He also said: "Whoever authenticates something, legislates it." And: "Any innovation – contrary to the *Qur'an*, *Sunnah*, *Ḥadīth*, or *ijmā'* is a *bid'ah* that leads to misguidance." Wakī' said: "I regard committing adultery as being of a lesser consequence than asking an innovator for an opinion."

Previous religions failed to implement their teachings not because of the disobedience of their people, but because their scriptures were taken lightly and interpreted vainly, or even fabricated, thereby leaving people to submit in ignorance or to transgress because of arrogance. Allah has protected the Noble *Qur'an* and it has therefore not been touched by fabrication or modification. He has also safeguarded the *Sunnah* by destining that it be protected by righteous critics who refuse any lies against it and who ensure that it is not manipulated by fabricators. He safeguards Islam by sending forth, in every generation, guardians who protect its authenticity against superstition and its purity from foreign influences. Ancient religions have perished because their principles were deviated by vain desire, leaving only their names untouched. With Islam, no

[211] *Riyāḍ aṣ-Ṣāliḥīn*, an-Nawawī, critically appraised by al-Albānī, ḥadīth no. 1841. Also included in an-Nawawī's *Forty Hadith*, no. 30.

matter how widespread *bid'ah* may be amongst its followers, there will always be dedicated scholars who will expose the evils of such heretical innovations. In this way, the truth prevails and falsehood is restrained. Even if falsehood is destined to exist, it will always be despised and scorned.

Scholars of religion carry the obligation of directing people to adhere to the plain realities of Islam as they have been conveyed by the Prophet (SAW). Ibn Mas'ūd said: "Take hold of knowledge before it is lost, as it will be lost when one who possesses it passes on. You will come across people who claim to be inviting to Allah's book but they will have flung it behind their backs, so take hold of knowledge. Beware of innovation, exaggeration and speculation, and rather adhere to that which is well established."[212]

'Umar ibn Yaḥya narrated:

> I heard my father speaking about his father and he narrated the following: "We were sitting outside 'Abdallah ibn Mas'ūd's door before the early morning prayer so that we could accompany him to the masjid when he came out. Abū Mūsa al-Ash'arī came to us and asked: 'Has Abū 'Abd ar-Raḥmān left as yet?' We said 'no,' so he sat down with us, waiting for him. When he came out we all stood up and Abū Mūsa said to him: 'O Abū 'Abd ar-Raḥmān (i.e. ibn Mas'ūd), I have just seen something in the masjid which is unknown to me and which I think – Praise be to Allah – is something good.' Ibn Mas'ūd asked: 'What is it?' He said: 'Come along and you will see.' He then said: 'I saw people in the masjid sitting in small groups waiting for the prayer. Each group was led by a man and they all held pebbles in their hands. The leader of each group would say: "Recite *Allahu Akbar* 100 times," and they would repeat this a hundred times. He would then do the same asking them to repeat "*Alḥamdulillah"* and "*Subaḥānallah"'*. Ibn Mas'ūd asked: 'What did you say to them?' He replied: 'I did not say anything to them; I wanted your opinion and command first.' Ibn Mas'ūd said: 'Did you not command them to count their bad deeds, or try to reassure them that nothing could wipe out their good deeds?' Ibn Mas'ūd then took off and we went with him until he reached one of those groups and stopped. He then said: 'What is it that I see you doing?' They said: 'We are counting the praises of Allah with these pebbles.' He then said: 'Count your bad deeds rather; I guarantee you that there is nothing that can cause you to lose any of your good deeds. Be warned, followers of Muhammad, that your destruction is near! The Companions of your Prophet are amongst you in abundance, his clothing has not yet deteriorated and his utensils are still intact, and by my own life, you are either following a

[212] *Sunan ad-Dārimī,* Introduction, ḥadīth no. 143.

> religion that is more instructive than the religion of Muhammad or you have opened the door of misguidance.' They said: 'By Allah, O Abū 'Abd ar-Raḥmān, we did not intend anything except what is good!' He said, 'There are many who seek good but do not achieve it. Indeed, Allah's Messenger (SAW) had spoken to us about those that recite the *Qur'an*, but it does not go beyond their throats. It may just be that most of them are amongst you.' He then turned away from them. 'Ammār ibn Salmah then said: 'I saw most of those people siding with the *Khawārij*, fighting against us, on the day of an-Nahrawān.[213]

'Abdallah ibn Mas'ūd also said: "Follow and do not innovate, this is sufficient for you."[214] Ibn Mas'ūd disliked additions that were not present in the era of the Prophet (SAW) and looked upon these innovated images with suspicion and misgiving. He saw the seeds of extremism flourishing within these individuals, through their attitude towards *dhikr* (ritual invocation). This led to their fundamentalist outlooks towards governance and reached the point where they accused the believers of disbelief. They were killed in battle, ridding the Muslim community of this thorn, but their ideas still remained. Ibn Mas'ūd also saw within them the seeds of innovation that would turn *dhikr*-gatherings into platforms where mobs would dance, claiming they had been overcome by some divine spirit.

Harsh criticism does not ward off the spread of *bid'ah*. When the ordinary masses turn away from the plain truth and the pure religion, they are easily attracted to these deviant practices, as if they were a long-pursued objective. One is amazed to see how these blemishes develop – through ignorance and bigotry – until they are accepted as being part of Islam and whoever is opposed to them is regarded as vain. Consider the following statement of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, in which he refers to the difficulty one is faced with in repelling *bid'ah*: "I have to deal with matters upon which elders have perished and with which the young have been brought up, which foreigners have learnt fluently and which has even been accepted by the Bedouins. They all regard these matters as part of Islam and do not regard anything other than this as the truth." If this was the extent of the growth of *bid'ah* in the era of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, imagine what it was like thereafter.

What is *Bid'ah*?

Scholars define *bid'ah* as: "An innovated procedure in religion, emulating something legitimate, having the same purpose as the legitimate procedure, or with the intention of showing extreme

[213] *Sunan ad-Dārimī,* Introduction, ḥadīth no. 206. See also *as-Silsilāh aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥah*, al-Albānī, 5/115.
[214] *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, Abu Khaythamah, critically appraised by al-Albānī as correct.

devotion to Allah." Innovation is the introduction of something new, something which people did not know before. Scholars in the West – who have invented the airplane, the train, the radio, etc. – are also innovators because they introduced things that were not known to their predecessors. Their innovations in these fields are praiseworthy. However, those that innovate sayings and actions and then embellish them so that people may regard them as part of Islam are innovators that introduce things that were not revealed by Allah or taught by His Prophet (SAW).

The essence of innovation is the creation of something that has no prior equivalent or any evidence as to its existence. Allah is referred to as *al-Badī'* (The Originator) because He created this world without there being anything similar to it before: **"The Originator of the heavens and the earth. When he decrees a matter, he only says to it: 'Be!' – and it is" (Q. 2: 117).**

The innovator has to make sure that his deception appears to be the truth. He therefore tries very hard to emulate the *Sharī'ah* in outlook, even if he opposes it in essence. The one who circulates *bid'ah* is, therefore, similar to a counterfeiter. Counterfeit syndicates try very hard to use colours and characteristics that imitate the original currency as closely as possible, so that the naïve may easily be deceived. After the currency is counterfeited, it is mixed with some of the original so that it may appear to be all the same, making it easy to circulate.

The earlier *Imāms* of Islam were extremely dedicated to searching for and putting an end to *bid'ah*, in a way similar to the dedication shown by current governments in tracing counterfeit money and punishing the criminals who produce and circulate it. The *Imāms* were sustained by the teachings of the Prophet (SAW), who said: **"Whoever innovates something concerning our affairs, which has nothing to do with us, is indeed rejected."**[215] Similarly, he said: **"Whoever carries out an action that we have not ordered is indeed rejected."**[216] Both these *aḥadīth* declare war against *bid'ah*; the first with regards to its innovation and the second with regards to its acceptance and implementation. If innovations in Allah's religion were met with one-tenth of the force with which money counterfeiting is met, the essence of Islam would have remained pure, making it all the more attractive and easier to adhere to. Unfortunately, people grant more importance to matters of their livelihood and exert greater effort to safeguard it. Matters of religion are given less importance, thereby allowing *bid'ah* to become widespread, which results in the truth slowly vanishing.

[215] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Reconciliation, ḥadīth no. 2459.
[216] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Judgements, ḥadīth no. 3243.

The enemies of Islam dedicate themselves to promoting these innovations, creating the impression that this is all that the religion consists of. In this way Islam loses its natural attraction and clear sense. One notices the evil intent directed towards Islam and Muslims in the following article published in *The Times* newspaper, under the title "Colonialism and Islam": "Islam is spreading quickly in West Africa, causing great concern amongst missionaries and Europeans as to what outcome this may bring about in the region. The belief in the past had been that Islam was a religion of desert communities that may proceed towards civilization; the current turn of events indicates that the circle of Islam is widening. One can hardly believe that it has been able to penetrate the equatorial regions and reach as far as the South, as is the case with Sierra-Leone, the Ivory Coast, and the Gold Coast. Bureaucrats have expressed fear that the spread of Islam in this area will be followed by the establishment of links with Cairo and the Arab world. Western thinkers differ on the future of Islam in Africa. Some say that the progress of Islam will not harm the welfare of colonialism as long as it stays within the course set by the colonialists. Others deem it necessary to limit the progress of Islam by spreading innovations and superstitions so that these may act as a barrier against the increasing pressure of Islam." Do you see how *bid'ah* acts as a stumbling block in front of Islam, weakening its strength, tearing apart its state?

A specific characteristic of these innovations is that they are very similar to business fraud, in which different products are mixed with inferior components and then sent to the markets as if they are products of high quality. Someone who wants to introduce something into Islam does not do so openly, proclaiming it to be a part of the religion. He covers his innovation so that it appears to emulate the *Sharī'ah*, or he draws some false links with its principles and sources. Look at the idolaters who sought to justify the worshipping of their idols by claiming that they acted as intermediaries with Allah.[217] When they circumambulated the *Ka'bah* naked, they claimed that they did not want to do so in clothing they had worn while showing disobedience to Allah!

Innovations that occur under the category of acts of worship creep into and infiltrate the body of teachings introduced by Islam. As is well established from its texts, Islam comprises of beliefs, acts of worship, ethics, politics, personal laws, civil laws, criminal laws, and so forth. Committing excesses in trying to gain closeness to Allah is initially manifested in acts of normal obedience,

[217] **"And those who take helpers besides Allah (say): 'We Worship them only that they may bring us near to Allah'" (Q. 39: 3)** [Translator].

through additions and unnecessary difficulty. Such excessiveness may also be directed towards other teachings of Islam, by stipulating customs and rules with the intention of incorporating them into the religion when, in fact, they are based only on pure vanity. In this way innovation encompasses acts of worship and conduct.

However, innovation in the category of conduct is not regarded as *bid'ah* if it does not aim to emulate the objectives and practices of Islam. This type of innovation is, in fact, viewed positively by the *Sharī'ah*, which stipulates very precise measures for the general welfare of the community. This means that innovation and modernization are approved of as long as they fall within the framework that we have just indicated. The fundamental principle regarding acts of worship is to adhere very strictly to the standards that have been preordained; innovation in this category is viewed as oppressive and misguiding.

One might ask: is there a difference between innovation in conduct and innovation in acts of worship? In this regard, it must be said that the acts of submission stipulated by the Lawgiver are based upon specific texts and take very specific forms, leaving no place for the creation of new forms. As far as general principles and worldly matters are concerned, one sees that the Lawgiver pays no attention to their forms or framework, but is rather concerned with their implications and objectives.

Introducing a new prayer to the prescribed prayers, or increasing the number of cycles (*raka'āt*) that have already been predetermined is something that is completely rejected. However, if people set out to establish sewage systems underground and to provide running water to masjids because Islam stipulates cleanliness, thereby introducing systems that were unknown to our predecessors, then these developments cannot be regarded as objectionable innovations. Indeed, *bid'ah* – according to the definition we have provided – has no link to worldly matters and cannot be implicated in the modernization and development introduced to uplift humankind.

Bid'ah cannot simply be regarded as a sin. A sin is something that goes contrary to a text or transgresses upon a principle with both still remaining intact and clearly defined as outlined by the *Sharī'ah*. An act that is *bid'ah* undermines and neutralizes both the text and the principle; it deviates from the authenticity of the Divine Address by incorporating vain desires. This only serves to lead away from the straight path. A sinner transgresses the command of Allah but is still aware of what Allah has commanded; he may even repent in the near or distant future. The

innovator does not understand the requirements of the religion so he tries to gain closeness to Allah by methods that are invalid; he performs acts that are not obligatory, which may even be prohibited. However, a sin may transform into an innovation if it comes to be regarded as part of the religion. To charge money for reciting the *Qur'an*, for example, is strictly prohibited as it contradicts the following statement of the Prophet (SAW): "**Do not earn your living by it (i.e. the *Qur'an*).**"[218] If this act is adopted as a religious practice and people are hired to recite at funerals as a means of gaining closeness to Allah, they have inadvertently committed a compounded sin, i.e., disobedience and innovation.

Some scholars regard all infringements and innovations that emerged after the Prophet (SAW) as *bid'ah*, whether a sin that is repelled by the Lawgiver or an innovation fabricated by ignorant and prejudiced individuals under the pretence that it is part of the religion when, in fact, it is not. This generalization is far from being precise. Even further are those who regard *bid'ah* as encompassing all innovations that occurred after the Prophet (SAW), whether in conduct or worship, good or bad, praiseworthy or reprehensible.

The first definition was adopted by Imām ash-Shāṭibī. He studied all reprehensible innovations in this light in a very original and praiseworthy book, which he called *al-'Itiṣām (The Refuge)*. To regard everything that is new in Allah's religion or in worldly matters as *bid'ah* would be closer to its linguistic meaning than to the meaning that is implied by the *Sharī'ah*. Al-Qarāfī and 'Izz ad-Dīn ibn 'Abd as-Salām have inclined towards this meaning. Their position is not flawless, even if it leads to the rejection of all conspired additions to Islam. From this perspective, there is no disagreement amongst the scholars, even if they disagree as to the precise meaning of the word *bid'ah*.

Between *Bid'ah* and *al-Maṣlaḥah al-Mursalah* (Public Welfare)

Professor 'Abd al-Wahhāb Khallāf states in his book *The Science of Usūl al-Fiqh*: "One who peruses the verses of the *Qur'an* pertaining to laws regarding worship finds that they are very detailed. This is also the case with personal matters such as inheritance, partly because most laws of this type are devotional and do not fall into the sphere of applied reason or change with the changing of the environment. Allah's rulings pertaining to laws other than worship and personal matters, like civil law, criminal law, constitutional law, economic law, etc, are, in the majority of

[218] *Musnad Aḥmad*, ḥadīth no. 15115.

cases,[219] basic principles that rarely go into specific details. This is because these rulings tend to change with the changing of the environment and according to the public welfare. The *Qur'an* limits these rulings to general normative and foundational principles so that rulers in any era are able to stipulate the specific details of the law in accordance with their own welfare, keeping them within the general boundaries set by the *Qur'an* and without any contradiction."

Najm ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūfī said: "We only consider the public welfare in matters of conduct and not in matters of worship and the like, because these fall within the rights of the Lawgiver and are specific to Him. It is not possible to have knowledge of His rights, in relation to time, space, quantity, etc., except as He has directed and the servant is therefore compelled to comply to the stipulations set by Him. This is because a slave is only regarded as obedient if he complies with the directions of his master and does only that which he knows will please him. This is exactly the case here; when philosophers rejected the law and approached religious devotion as an application of their intellects, they incurred the wrath of Allah and were misled and led others astray. This is, however, not the case with commissioned rights, as these concern political rulings implemented for the general welfare and determined by it."

'Izz ad-Dīn ibn 'Abd as-Salām stated in relation to this: "Whoever considers the general purposes of the law, which are based on the obtaining of welfare and the repelling of perversity, realizes that it is not permissible to be lax in obtaining welfare or in overlooking perversity even if it is not stipulated by *ijmā'* or *qiyās* or any specific text; the understanding of the law makes this an obligation."

From these statements we learn that the position towards enactments dealing with acts of worship is not the same as enactments dealing with conduct. The Lawgiver takes the responsibility of stipulating the realities of worship with regard to form, time, place, quantity, method, what is general and what is specific, etc. This is specified by His wisdom and there is no room for the exertion of our own opinions; we are only required to fulfil these obligations. The acts of worship should remain the same as they have been from the era of the Prophet (SAW) to the end of time, with no difference between our predecessors and the generations to come. Complete compliance has to be shown in this matter, from beginning to end.

[219] The obligatory limitations that are however expressed are a right of Allah, decreed by Him, with no room for the exercising of personal opinion in the matter.

However, all other enactments revolve around the public welfare and all the preserved texts and stipulated principles point towards the attainment of this objective. It is not possible to specify the ways of attaining these reforms because of the inherent differences between one generation and another or one nation and another. One may also be able to achieve the same reforms through different methods and, therefore, all alternatives are to be regarded as acceptable. The fact that all enactments concerning conduct are founded upon logical reforms does not diminish the importance of the textual sources that provide the necessary principles and details. These texts can be compared to the concrete foundations that lie underground: one is able to construct the building of one's choice, employing any methods, but one is obligated to depend upon these foundations and recognize their importance.

The breadth of the sphere within which the intellect operates alongside the text in matters of conduct has prompted some to follow the same course with regards to acts of worship. This is a manifest error. As has been shown, the foundation of acts of worship is straight forward compliance. The position is obviously different for other matters; whatever developments take place with regards to these matters cannot correctly be referred to as *bid'ah*, whether praiseworthy or reprehensible.

Indeed the preservation of the five fundamentals is a responsibility shared by divine legislation and by worldly laws, even though Allah's guidance is obviously far wiser and more reliable. The five fundamentals are: *religion*, *life*, *honour*, *intellect* and *wealth*. The preservation of these fundamental rights is based upon many proofs, but this is not the place to explain them all. One may not find a specific proof, maybe just a statement vindicating these five fundamentals or any one of them. If this proof is respected by the Lawgiver, it is acted upon. For example, the single directive ordering the compilation of the *Qur'an* into a single volume served to preserve the *Sharī'ah* and helped implement Islam. Writing books that explain the Islamic belief system and that refute the scepticism of atheists serves a similar objective. Even though they have not been stipulated by the religion, all these actions serve to promote the general objectives of Islam and are referred to by some as *al-Maṣāliḥ al-Mursalah* (the public welfare). They are reforms that are the product of sincere reasoning and serve to promote the betterment of people's livelihood, in addition to securing their salvation in the hereafter.

It is incorrect to refer to these actions as *bid'ah hasanah* (a good innovation) or as *bid'ah wājibah* (an obligatory innovation), etc. People make such categorizations thinking that these actions are

innovations because they did not occur in the era of the Prophet (SAW). Similarly, they think that they do not fall into the category of reprehensible innovations because they lead to good results. This, in reality, only confuses the meaning of disliked innovation. It confuses what is valid in acts of worship and what is valid in acts of conduct.

Bid'ah is confined only to devotional acts, in which the exertion of opinion plays no part. Matters of public welfare lay in the sphere of conduct, where reason is exerted to arrive at the best general reforms. There is therefore a vast difference between *bid'ah* and *al-Maṣāliḥ al-Mursalah*.

Bid' (pl. of *bid'ah*) are innovations introduced by ignorant worshippers with the intention of gaining closeness to Allah, as they claim. They are innovations that were introduced with the intention of performing the innovated act itself. *Al-Maṣāliḥ al-Mursalah*, on the other hand, are actions that are introduced for the preservation of the general rights of the majority of the community. Therefore, not everything that emerges with the passing of time is to be regarded as an act of *bid'ah* for which punishment is to be expected. As long as an overriding principle has been recognized and approved of by the Lawgiver, it is not regarded as *bid'ah*. There are many examples of this. Conclusions derived by acceptable analogies can therefore not simply be described as *bid'ah*. Examples of these would be actions that fall into the sphere of the promotion of the public welfare approved of by the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah,* as well as various actions that are encompassed by a general command in which a specific illustration has not been defined by established rules. Allah, the Most Honoured and Most High, states: **"And do good that you may be successful" (Q. 22: 77),** as well as **"Help you one another in virtue and righteousness" (Q. 5: 2).**

There is no harm in creating different ways to do good and to help promote virtue and righteousness. One cannot reject or make any accusations against these methods if they are innovative and broad-based. Allah, the Blessed and Sublime, also states: **"And fight in the Way of Allah and know that Allah is the All-Hearer, All-Knower" (Q. 2: 244).** This verse indicates that the methods and spheres of fighting are immeasurable. The expression of creative genius that occurs in this field has no link whatsoever with reprehensible innovation. It is in fact a response to a divine calling.

However, general texts cannot be used to advance arguments for the creation of actions that would conflict with specified acts that the Prophet (SAW) has stipulated. Allah states: **"O you**

who believe! Remember Allah with much remembrance. And glorify His praises morning and afternoon" (Q. 33: 41-42). This command to remember Allah profusely and to praise Him constantly does not give one the right to add a cycle (*rak'ah*) to the prayer, or to validate the *adhān* for the Eid prayer, or to write formulae and obligate the community to recite them, etc. All these acts of worship have already been cast in their final forms. No person, no matter what his position, is allowed to add anything new in this regard.

However, there is no harm in implementing orders that concern general matters even if this was not done by our predecessors. This is equivalent to the application of one law to several situations. The protection of wealth, the safeguarding of rights, and the consideration of welfare all form the primary purposes of the *Sharī'ah*.

If a ruler sees that he has to mandate certain taxes or implement certain measures to guarantee the safety of his people, then he is obligated to do so even if no such measures were implemented in the era of the Prophet (SAW). By doing so, he is not regarded as having created a *bid'ah*. The implementation of 80 lashes as a punishment for drinking by the companions of the Prophet (SAW) is an example. Another example is the provision of guarantees by manufacturers for damaged products, or the implementation of capital punishment upon all the participants in a murder (even if they were a hundred participants) or the introduction of imprisonment. These matters were all dealt with by the companions and their followers, without any repudiation, and were referred to by some as *al-Maṣāliḥ al-Mursalah*, as we have mentioned. The title does not concern us, only the concept. There is no disagreement amongst judicious scholars that Islam has general purposes that are understood from its texts and many directives. It is possible to reach these established general objectives with innovative, progressive means and one is not obligated to adhere to any single method as long as the intended objective is being sought.

Allah has commanded justice and fairness and the supporting of kin; He has prohibited lewdness, evil-deeds and oppression. Whatever leads to the implementation of good and the removal of evil is regarded as an acceptable method in order to pursue development and in submission to the requirements of time and place; it cannot be seen as a prohibited innovation. As a result, we are able to accept the introduction of an attorney-general's office in the legal bureaucracy as a guarantee to ensure legal proceedings and to safeguard the rights of the community. We accept,

as well, the current system of courts and their arrangement, even if it was not prevalent in the earlier eras. The creation of as many guarantees as possible to resolve disputes amongst people does not fall into the framework of *bid'ah*. Prohibited innovation involves actions that fall into the sphere of purely devotional acts, in which there is no room for *ijtihād* and the application of reason. In the sphere of conduct, where the Lawgiver has not drawn up clear boundaries that have to be adhered to, innovation that leads to good is not only acceptable but in reality falls under the famous principle: *that without which an obligatory act cannot be fulfilled is to be regarded as obligatory itself*.

The Boundaries of Compliance

Precise conformity to the teachings of the Prophet (SAW) requires that we do not disregard anything that he did nor do we do anything that he disregarded. The *Sunnah* deals with the positive and negative together, i.e., there are certain practices the performance of which is regarded as *Sunnah,* and others the abstinence of which is regarded as *Sunnah*.

Adding to reported practices by attaching something new or by filling in a blank where nothing was reported (thereby taking initiatives pertaining to matters that the Prophet (SAW) had remained silent on) are both regarded as reprehensible innovations; neither is sanctioned by Islam. A person that does something that was ignored by the Prophet (SAW) is the same as someone who ignores that which was performed by him. We have explained earlier that evolving methods, by their nature, do not fall into this framework. Therefore, waging war with cannons is not regarded as *bid'ah*, or as an action that was disregarded by the Prophet (SAW). It, in fact, falls under the principle of *that without which an obligatory act cannot be fulfilled is to be regarded as obligatory itself*. The discussion revolves around established objectives and defined obligations. Therefore, whatever was ignored by the Prophet (SAW) with the possibility existing of it being performed and without the presence of any inhibitor is regarded as *Sunnah*; i.e. *Sunnah* to ignore. To perform such an act is regarded as *bid'ah*.

Muslims of today are in the habit of gathering after someone's death, sometimes in a large tent, to listen to the *Qur'an* being recited and where refreshments are thereafter served.[220] People seek solace or consolation in this way. There is no doubt that the intention of reward and attaining mercy were ever present amongst our earliest predecessors. In spite of this, we did not see any of

[220] This practice – as described – is still prevalent in the Arab world and is referred to as *Ta'ziyyah* (lit. condolence or consolation). In other parts of the Muslim world it may take different forms [Translator].

the practices we see today when one of the companions passed away. Many of them died and therefore soliciting mercy on their behalf was only natural; there was nothing to stop the companions from putting up tents in which to listen to recitations of the *Qur'an* and to exchange condolences. This widespread practice is an innovation because the Prophet (SAW) did not give permission for it and did not resort to it, in spite of the opportunity for doing so existing and the absence of any inhibitor. Therefore, if one thinks that not performing these acts makes one negligent of attaining Allah's pleasure, or of soliciting mercy for the deceased, it would reflect a very bad opinion of the Prophet (SAW) and his companions. There is, however, no way that we will ever be like them or come even close to their status.

One might argue that 'Umar (R.A) had gathered the people under one *Imām* for prayers in Ramaḍān, even though this was not undertaken in the Prophet's (SAW) lifetime.[221] It is, in fact, firmly established that the Prophet (SAW) did not really wish to have the people join him in this prayer but when they did, he lightened the prayer (i.e. he did not extend it for a long period). This is true, but the secret behind 'Umar's action is that the fear which had prompted the Prophet (SAW) to want to pray alone was no longer present. When the Prophet (SAW) saw the dedication of the community in emulating him in the performance of the *tahajjud* (midnight-early morning) prayer, he became concerned that it would be regarded as obligatory and thus did not continue with it. When the Prophet (SAW) passed away, revelation came to a stop and all doubts and fears in this regard were resolved. The fear of obligation had fallen away and the desire to perform this prayer remained. 'Umar, thus, saw no harm in bringing the community together for the *Tarawīḥ* prayer. In addition, 'Umar was one of the senior Righteous Caliphs, by the command of the Prophet (SAW) himself, and therefore his practices are part of the guidance of Islam and adherence to them is just another way of following the Prophet (SAW). Is this not in conformity to the Prophet's (SAW) command?[222]

Indeed, that which Allah's Messenger (SAW) had refrained from, with opportunities existing for him to indulge in and without anything inhibiting him, cannot possibly be part of Islam or be regarded as guidance to the straight path; if it were, he would never have refrained from it. We see no comparison between what the Prophet (SAW) refrained from (due to lack of need in that

[221] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of the *Tarāwīḥ* Prayer, ḥadīth no. 1871.
[222] Shaykh al-Ghazālī probably has the following *ḥadīth* in mind: **"Follow the example of these two after me, Abu Bakr and 'Umar."** It is narrated by at-Tirmidhī, in the book of virtues (see also *Tuḥfatul Aḥwadhī*, vol. 10, p. 102, *ḥadīth* no. 3906) [Translator].

particular context) and *bid'ah.* The Prophet (SAW) had legislated the general principles that would lead to the performance of the action when the need arose. In fact, the performance of this action is in conformity with the principles of Islam. For example, the Prophet (SAW) refrained from pronouncing the *niyyah* (intention) when performing acts of worship, so one learns that to refrain is a *Sunnah* and to pronounce the *niyyah* is *bid'ah*.

The Prophet (SAW) did not use the methods and syllogisms of logic in its technical sense – as introduced by Aristotle and others – when debating with his opponents. There would be no harm done if we were to use them, due to the development of our environments and the spread of these philosophies. We would, in fact, be defending the religion with a method that is now suitable. Addressing illiterate individuals is not the same as addressing the People of the Book of the first era, or addressing liberated rationalists.

We fear that the danger confronting the teachings of Islam is that people have started performing acts that the Prophet (SAW) had deliberately refrained from, with his Rightly Guided Companions following in his example. His companions would have been the first to perform these acts had there been any good in them, or if they were seen as a means of gaining closeness to Allah.

If only those that bounce around at religious dance-parties (called *dhikr*) could direct their efforts at something like football instead, it would be far more beneficial to them, to the rest of us, and to Islam as well. Why should we burden ourselves with what Allah has pardoned us from, or adhere to something that He has made no mention of? The Prophet (SAW) said: **"Indeed Allah has made obligatory certain things, so do not neglect them, and He has appointed limitations, so do not transgress them, and He has remained silent on many matters as a mercy to you – not out of forgetfulness, so do not delve into them."**[223]

Ibn Qayyim states in his book *A'lām al-Muwaqqi'īn*: "As to their (the companions of the Prophet) reports concerning that which the Prophet (SAW) had refrained from, we find that there are two types, both of which are *Sunnah.* The first is their clear reports that the Prophet (SAW) had refrained from something, and did not do it, like the washing and praying upon the martyrs of Uhud, the *adhān* and *iqāmah* for the Eid prayer, and the *tasbīḥ* between the two prayers, when

[223] *Riyāḍ aṣ-Ṣāliḥīn*, an-Nawawī, critically appraised by al-Albānī, ḥadīth no. 1841. Also included in an-Nawawī's *Forty Hadith*, no. 30.

they are joined. The second is that which they did not report; if the Prophet (SAW) had in fact undertaken a certain action they would certainly have paid attention to it – all or at least one of them. So if they did not report an action, or talk about it in some gathering, one knows that the Prophet (SAW) did not perform it, like refraining from pronouncing the *niyyah* (intention) when beginning the prayer, or refraining from making *du'ā'* after the prayer, facing the congregation with all of them echoing *āmīn* in response to his *du'ā'*, after *Fajr* and *'Asr*, or after all the appointed prayer times."

Ibn Qayyim then explained that the Prophet's (SAW) abstentions are a *Sunnah*, just as his actions are. If we respond by performing an action that the Prophet (SAW) had avoided, it would be equivalent to responding by leaving out that which he had done; there is no difference in this respect. Ash-Shāṭibī also supports this principle in his book *al-I'tiṣām (The Refuge)*.

Someone may ask: if the Lawgiver keeps silent on something, is it not permissible for us to either carry out the act or to refrain from it. Ash-Shāṭibī responded: "The silence of the Lawgiver with regards to a ruling on a particular issue, or his ignoring of a particular matter, is of two types. The first type includes issues on which the Lawgiver remained silent as there was no call or incentive for a response, like issues that occurred after the death of the Prophet (SAW) and that did not occur in his lifetime. Scholars of the *Sharī'ah* therefore needed to consider these issues in the light of the broader principles upon which Islam was founded. All the issues considered by our righteous predecessors are of this type, like guarantees for producers, inheritance of the grandfather with the brothers, support of legal heirs, the compilation of the *Qur'an* into book form, codification of legislation, etc. These are, in other words, issues for which there was no need of a resolution in the era of the Prophet (SAW). The scholar would therefore deliberate on issues of this type when the need arose; silence on these issues does not imply that ignoring them is permissible.

"The second type are those rulings on which the Lawgiver remained silent, or when he ignored a certain matter, with the need for it being apparent and a reason for it to be addressed being present in the era of revelation. The Lawgiver did not specify a ruling that would clarify that this was, in fact, an issue pertaining to the religion. This section, specifically, constitutes a reprehensible innovation from the perspective of the law."

He then stated: "The proof for this being a *bid'ah* is that remaining silent on the issue – with the possibility of its being performed existing – is the consensus (*ijmā'*) of all those who remained silent on the issue, i.e., there was not supposed to be any addition to what already was. If it had been proper, from the perspective of the law, they would have carried it out as they were most likely to perceive this and precede us in its performance." This is the position that has been decided upon by the jurists of the *Ummah* and the *Ummah* is thus obligated to comply.

Bid'ah: Original Innovations and Imitative Innovations

We have thus far said that innovation doubtlessly shares a similarity with the *Sharī'ah,* but is stimulated by extremism and unfounded additions. The effects of these fabrications vary extensively and therefore *bid'ah* may be divided into various categories. That which differs from Islam in both form and content and has strayed extensively from its clear methodology is not the same as that which is linked to it in some way or borrows from its teaching for some reason or the other.

For this reason scholars have divided *bid'ah* into that which is original (*al-bid'ah al-ḥaqīqiyyah*) and that which is imitative (*al-bid'ah al-iḍāfiyyah*). For example, circumambulating the tombs of the dead – which is done in a manner similar to the circumambulation of the *Ka'bah* – is an original innovation. The Lawgiver permitted the visiting of graves as a reminder of the final destiny of all human beings and to deflate the intense sense of vanity caused by this life, which dominates the attention of many people. The elevation of graves and the building of domes over them, the sanctification of corpses, special visits and circumambulation of graves two, three or four times as a means of drawing closer to Allah are all practices that are without doubt regarded as original innovations. If the inhabitants of these graves are supplicated to with the hope of some sort of response, then this action is tantamount to transgression and *shirk* (associating partners with Allah).

Such rituals have no basis in the laws and ethics of Islam and were invented by weak-minded people; they are therefore classified as *al-bid'ah al-ḥaqīqiyyah* (original innovations). Examples include the puritanism and celibacy of the clergy and their abstention from wholesome and permissible things as an expression of intense worship of Allah, the rejection of textual injunctions and considered analogies in favour of one's own unique thinking or absolute speculation under the pretext that the intellect – without the assistance of revelation – is able to attain that which would please Allah. In general, *al-bid'ah al-ḥaqīqiyyah* (original innovations)

have no justification or proof from the *Qur'an*, the *Sunnah* or *ijmā'* (consensus), and have no approval based on considered opinion that is able to link it to the fundamentals of Islam.

What is referred to as *al-bid'ah al-iḍāfiyyah* (an imitative innovation) is far more widespread and enjoys fertile breeding ground amongst people. These are matters that are afflicted by mixed judgment, regarded as *Sunnah* from one perspective and as *bid'ah* from another. If one considered these matters from a certain perspective, one finds that they are based on a sound principle or a specific text. When considered from another angle, one clearly sees the innovated factor in the form of the fabricated status that encompasses the act. For example, the concluding of the prayer with the recitation of the *Tasbīḥ* (glorification, praise, and majesty of Allah[224]) is a practice that is regarded as mandatory (*mandūb*) by scholars – without any difference of opinion – due to the authentic *aḥādīth* that have been transmitted on the issue. The Prophet (SAW) and his companions used to conclude their prayers in this manner (individually and in silent recitation) until someone came along and systemized these invocations, thinking that one of the worshippers could assemble the people around them in a manner that would bond together the members of the congregation. This led to the appointed person for this *khatam* (conclusion) chanting the invocations and supplications while the congregation of worshippers followed him, reciting *āmīn* before finally departing. The *tasbīḥ* is a *Sunnah*, but this new form of performing it is an innovation (*bid'ah*). Those who oppose this innovation are of the opinion that the transmitted practices of the Prophet (SAW) should not be overstepped. Those who indulge in it regard it as a means of joint co-operation in fulfilling a *Sunnah,* which people in their individual capacities might ignore.

The recitation of *Surah al-Kahf*[225] before the Friday congregational prayer is a similar case. It is well known that the Prophet (SAW) and his Companions used to strive to perform the obligation of *al-Jumu'ah* (the Friday congregational prayer). When reaching the masjid, they would enter in silence and seat themselves with respect, with unchanging tranquillity and veneration, until they had listened to the sermon and performed the prayer. There is no tradition whatsoever that has been transmitted making the recitation of *Surah al-Kahf* (as is practised by people today) one of the rituals connected with the Friday congregational prayer. However, there are weak traditions that encourage the recitation of this *Surah*, along with others, on Thursday evening or on Friday. Al-Ḥākim reports that the Prophet (SAW) said: **"Whoever recites *Surah al-Kahf* on Friday will**

[224] By reciting the invocations: *Subḥānallah*, *Alḥamdulillah* and *Allahuakbar* [Translator].
[225] The 18th chapter of the Qur'an [Translator].

have that which is between him and two Fridays filled with light." A similar report mentions Thursday evening instead of Friday.[226] Even if we were to ignore the opinion concerning the weakness of these *aḥādīth* and accept their content, it would not legitimate its observance by gathering people around a reciter in this decisive fashion. The Prophet (SAW), his righteous companions and the masses of the Muslim community continued practising the rituals of Friday for several centuries without such recitations before or after the prayer. To do what the Prophet (SAW) had done and to abstain from that which he had abstained from is the *Sunnah*, liberated from all speculation. Muslims today make the recitation of *Surah al-Kahf* before the Friday prayer a practice that is regulated and systemized, where the best voices are chosen for the recitation, in addition to *fatwas* (juristic opinions) being issued to encourage the practice.

Another imitative innovation is the joining of salutations upon the Prophet (SAW) with the *adhān* (call to prayer), resulting in lay people thinking that it is part of the *adhān*. The words of the *adhān* are protected, having being specified in authentically narrated texts. In the eras of the Prophet (SAW), his righteous companions and the communities of our predecessors, the *adhān* was free of any such additions. Salutations upon the Prophet (SAW) are a separate practice that have their own context, place and rules. When Muslims hear the *adhān* it is mandatory for them to repeat its words, to recite salutations upon the Prophet (SAW), and to ask Allah to grant him preference, an elevated station and the ability to act as an intercessor. Strange, innovated formulations in salutation of the Prophet (SAW) have arisen and have been joined with the pronouncement of the *adhān* to bring the two together in a single conjunction. This fabrication has become imposed onto the method of this ritual. Added to this is the dedication shown on the part of the *muadhdhin* (caller to prayer) to swaying and chanting while inviting people to Allah. The practice of the *adhān* has thus been transformed into a frivolous tune, having once been a serious, dignified call.

From these examples, we realise that imitative innovations are practices that, in the majority, are taken from established or dubious teachings of the *Sharī'ah*, which are then overtaken by actions and fabrications that remove them from their intended framework. The teachings of Islam are like the workings of the body, with its senses and characteristics. If you were to take a leg and put it in

[226] *Sunan ad-Dārimī,* Book of Virtues of the Qur'an, ḥadīth no. 3273. Ibn Kathīr states in his Tafsīr: "Reported by Ibn Mardaway and Sa'īd ibn Mansūr. This *ḥadīth* is probably *marfū'* (attributed to the Prophet, but not actually his pronouncement); in the best of conditions, this is a statement of Abu Sa'īd al-Khudri."

the place of a hand, or an ear in the place of the nose, you would cause damage to the body, even if you did not introduce something new from outside the body.

Ash-Shāṭibī summarizes the essence of an imitative innovation as follows: "It has two perspectives: the first is linked to accepted proofs and it is not an innovation in this regard. From the second perspective, it conflicts with appearance, order and position, making it similar to an original innovation. Therefore, because it is not completely independent from any of the above perspectives, it merits being called *al-bid'ah al-iḍāfiyyah* (an imitative innovation)." Indeed, its validity from the perspective of its source is firm, whereas from the perspective of method, conditions and detail, it is not. It may be based on an opposable obscurity or not upon anything specific. This is what makes it objectionable, because all acts of worship are to be rejected if they do not emanate from the Lawgiver.

It is imperative to qualify that the explanation of the general Qur'anic directives by Allah's Prophet (SAW) by way of his practical actions are not open to any additional considerations, either in principle or form. Ibn Ḥajr was asked about the salutations and greetings after the *adhān* as it is now commonly practised. His reply was: "The principle is a *Sunnah*, but the method is *bid'ah* (an innovation)." The verse: **"O you who believe! Send you salutations and greetings upon him [with the Islamic] way of greeting"(Q. 33: 56)** is not acceptable as a justification for this innovation. We can never be more knowledgeable than the Prophet (SAW) and his companions concerning the method of acceptable implementation.

Lay people have invented a prayer for the months of Rajab and Sha'bān, which is performed with specific intentions. Some scholars have shown leniency in allowing these prayers, arguing that prayer in general is not a practice that is disapproved of. an-Nawawī said – in condemnation – that these two prayers are, "A spurious, vile and rejected innovation." He then said: "You should not be misled by the fact that they are mentioned in books like *Qūt al-Qulūb* and *Iḥyā 'Ulūm ad-Dīn*.[227] None has the right to draw evidence for their legitimacy from the Prophet's (SAW) saying: **'The prayer is the best intention.'**[228] This is in specific reference to prayer that does not contradict the law in any way."

[227] *Qūt al-Qulūb* is a famous tract by Abū Tālib al-Makkī and *Ihyā 'Ulūm ad-Dīn* was written by the 12th century reformer, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī [Translator].
[228] *Musnad Aḥmad*, ḥadīth no. 20572.

Exploiting a general Qur'anic text by using it as a basis for changing an act of worship, enforcing obedience, or portraying devotion in a specific manner contradicts the guidance of Allah's Messenger (SAW). On this basis, scholars regard the *adhān* inside the masjid for the Friday prayers (not the first one over the P.A. system, but the second *adhān*) as an imitative *bid'ah*. The *adhān* in its essence is valid, but in view of the place in which it is being performed, it is an innovation. The raising of the voice while reciting the *Qur'an* in front of the deceased (*al-janā'iz*) is a similar example. Indeed, invoking Allah and reading His book are part of Islam, but not in this manner or under these circumstances. A similar example is fasting on the 27th of Rajab and the 15th of Sha'bān; the act of fasting is a form of worship but specifying these days is *bid'ah*.

It is apparent that those dedicated to these innovations are blending virtuous actions with vile ones, even if they think that all of their actions are commendable and free from fault. This is only as a result of their ignorance of the position of the *Sunnah* and their rigidity with regards to what they have learnt through imitating individuals inclined to ignorance and vain desire.

Perhaps what invites the most astonishment concerning such people is the rapidity with which they cast aspersions upon whoever tries to teach them authentic religious practices. If someone tries to strip the *adhān* of the additions that have been joined to it, attempting to return to the practice of the first generation and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW), such a person is accused of expressing dislike for Allah's Messenger (SAW).

Professor al-'Adawī stated: "One should know that the one who rejects the above-mentioned innovation does so from the second perspective, i.e., the perspective of innovation. What some people say with regards to others, i.e. that he/she rejects the *du'ā'* or *dhikr* or salutations upon the Prophet (SAW) or the recitation of the *Qur'an*, are all statements that arise out of ignorance of Islam and ignorance of the intentions of the person who supposedly rejects these practices. They may even be statements that are intended to slander the one who invites to the *Sunnah*."

He added: "One of my friends informed me about a certain *Shaykh* (teacher) who, whenever he wanted to make an example out of one of his peers that taught people Islam, would gather the lay folk and ask them: 'What is your opinion on salutations upon the Prophet?' They would reply: 'It is a part of the religion!' He would then retort that so-and-so (his peer of whom he wanted to make an example) rejected this practice. He would then ask: 'What is your opinion on asking forgiveness and reciting the *Qur'an*?' They would reply: 'Asking forgiveness is an act of worship

and so is the recitation of the *Qur'an*.' He would then say to them that so-and-so rejected these two practices.

"When the *Shaykh* was asked why he had said these things when he, in fact, knew what the person had meant, he replied: 'I want the lay folk to have an aversion towards him so that they do not listen to any of his advice.' This kind of a *mufti* (one who gives legal opinions), in addition to the misguidance and innovation he spreads, is also burdened with the sin of casting accusations of falsehood at people."

Innovations in Acts of Worship and Matters of Custom

Our knowledge of the obligatory acts of worship has been conveyed to us by the Lawgiver alone. If there was no revelation pertaining to these matters, we would not have been able to perform them in the clear, ordered manner expounded by the Lawgiver. The five daily prayers, the number of their cycles, their times, their form and manner, are all matters that the religion alone is able to legislate. These, and all other acts of worship, are not open to the dictates of the intellect regarding form and quantity. We may perceive the face of wisdom in many of the required acts of obedience, or come to know the beautiful benefits of performing them as Allah has commanded, but this does not imply the independence of the intellect in judging and speculating on matters concerning worship, whether in general terms or in detail. Deference to the absolute authority of the revealed traditions is required in all of these matters, free from any interference.

Matters of custom, however, have a different status, with reason and experience playing a huge role. Custom was prevalent before the coming of Islam. It may be a great distance away from the guidance of Islam or it may adhere to the limits and ethics propagated by Islam, encouraging the believers to adhere to them as well. Muslims and unbelievers alike engage in eating, drinking, marriage, buying, selling and rental. They also enforce various rules to regulate peace and to administer the development and politics of the state, etc. Even though these examples of customary matters differ from absolute acts of worship in terms of the nature of legislation, Allah has surely not left people to go about them in accordance with the inclinations of personal opinion or desire. Many verses have been revealed in this regard, to guide us to that which protects our interests and prohibits whatever may cause harm.

Islam is a complete, multi-faceted religion. Everything that leaves an impression regarding purification of the self and the safety of society has been exposed and advised on by way of a set

of scriptural texts and principles. If the influence of Islam stopped at acts of worship, in which no intellectual exertion is required, thereafter leaving people free to legislate in general or customary matters, it would be like a pathway that does not lead to perfection, failing to protect individuals and communities from injustice, enmity and purposelessness.

Exalted virtues are not forged in the prayer-niche inasmuch as they are forged by refined conduct and lofty traditions. It is no wonder that Islam prescribes many rules pertaining to general customary matters, regarding their implementation as a sign of devotion, just like the implementation of acts of worship. We find thousands of well-ordered statements in the Book of Allah and the *Sunnah* of His Prophet (SAW) regarding these general matters, but some people still have the audacity to risk ignoring their value. These directives complement the injunctions on worship, whose teachings are found in other parts of the scriptural texts.

Take marriage as an example. It is a customary matter that all people confront, regardless of their differences in faith. Islam, however, legislates specific rules and religious obligations without which the marriage would not be valid. It is absolutely necessary to have a proposal, acceptance, a bridal-gift, and witnesses. Furthermore, a widowed woman cannot marry in her period of mourning, and if a couple is irrevocably divorced they cannot remarry. In addition, a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man, even though a Muslim man can marry Christian and Jewish women. There are also prohibited categories of women with whom a Muslim man cannot contract marriage under any circumstances, as well as ethics regarding sexual relations within marriage that Islam expounds on and that cannot be ignored.

Another example is trade, which is a general practice that everyone without exception is involved in from one perspective or another. Nevertheless, Islam places stipulations upon trade that a Muslim cannot ignore. Contracting parties have to be competent in conducting their affairs, sales have to be clean and beneficial with the items being sold belonging to the seller and fit for sale. There are rulings that prohibit risk, monopoly, usury, and cheating, mapping out for Islamic trade a just and clean path.

People – by their nature – eat, drink and attire themselves. Islam approaches these customary matters by prohibiting certain types of food, drink and clothing. The *Qur'an* stresses the prohibitions concerning food several times, as well as the disputes with the idolaters, Christians and Jews of the early generation in this regard. The longest verse revealed by Allah in the *Qur'an*

concerns the recording and witnessing of debt. When considering these customary matters, scholars have emphasized that the protection of public welfare is the prime objective and they have relied upon transmitted scriptural texts as well as general principles of legislation for guidance.

Intellectual speculation conforms to the noble law on many common rules of conduct. I have seen texts of classical civil law that have been amended for the needs of contemporary civil law so that – according to the people that have made the amendments – they may be closer to the general welfare. I noticed that sometimes the classical material conformed to the teachings of some prominent jurist, while the adjusted material conformed to the teachings of some other jurist. There is as such no distinction; Muslim jurists – through the strength of their faith in Allah and their desire to achieve His pleasure, as well as their understanding of His Law and their devotion to it for the benefit of humankind – used to judge these customary affairs and deal with them according to the teachings of Islam.

In contrast, men of public law do not pay consideration to the pleasure of Allah, nor do they respect His religion when passing legislation. One therefore notices that the mixing of customs with worship to reflect religious devotion is a part of the nature of our religion. So then, is innovation applicable to conventional practices as it is to acts of worship?

Regarding this, ash-Shāṭibī said:

> It has been entrenched in the principles of the law that all conventional acts are also devotional in some way. This is because any act whose import is not understood in detail – i.e., an act that is ordained or prohibited – is to be regarded as devotional; acts whose import are understood and whose benefits and risks are known are regarded as conventional.
>
> As such, ablution, prayer, fasting and pilgrimage are all acts of religious devotion, whereas buying, selling, divorce, rental and criminal offences are all conventional acts, as their rulings are clearly understandable. However, the latter also consist of a devotional aspect as they are restricted by the law so that the protagonist has no freedom of choice, whether dealing with a compulsory or a voluntary matter. Indeed, even voluntary acts pertaining to devotional matters are binding, just as compulsory acts are binding, according to the proofs laid down in my book, *al-Muwāfaqāt*.

> It is thus apparent that there is participation of both divisions, i.e., devotional acts have devotional and conventional aspects. Thus, if an innovation appears in matters of convention, it would be correct to apply it to conventional acts just as it is applicable to devotional acts. If not, then it would not apply.

Therefore, conventional matters of life have two aspects to them. First, that which is progressive, proceeding in submission to development and change. Islam places no restrictions on this aspect and is not concerned with compliance or innovation. It would be correct to quote, in this regard, the *ḥadīth*: **"You know best the matters pertaining to you world."**[229] This aspect is not the subject of our research. We do, however, strongly advise Muslims to engage in these matters with all of their hearts and with good intention. If a man follows the best example, he is able to benefit from everything in order to attain his goals. If the Muslim sought the pleasure of Allah through his actions, then all his efforts are acts of worship. His eating, sleeping, playing and marriage are all worship, over and above the burdens of his work if he is employed, or his business transactions or farming if he is a businessman or farmer. These purely conventional matters are overtaken by noble intentions based on piety and goodness as if they were prayer or *jihād* (exertion in the path of religion), in spite of remaining, in essence, free from all restrictions and unqualified by any specific agency or form. Innovation and excellence transform such matters from that which is good into that which is better.

As for the second aspect, the boundaries that are drawn by the Lawgiver, whether narrow or wide, have to be complied with and we have to adhere to whatever has been related to us on these matters in accordance with what the Lawgiver regards as closer to public welfare. This transmitted aspect should not be transgressed upon by disobedience nor corrupted by innovations. Islam does not intervene in ordinary matters of convention such as business, social matters, penal matters or political matters so as to bring hardship to people; intervention is for the express purpose of lifting hardship and to block the path of Satan, thereby protecting the masses from the fluidity of human-made laws that sometimes submit to peculiar impulses.

One might ask: What is the position of innovation in this case? Some people claim that they exaggerate and add to conventions and their transmitted forms so as to draw closer to Allah. Thus, they ask, how could they be creating innovations in conventional matters when the role of the Lawgiver is only to order (or administer) purely civil matters?

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[229] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Virtues, ḥadīth no. 4358.

In response, it must be said that when people emphasize specific interests (or welfares) as if they were divine ordinances, relying upon them as acts of worship, they thereby guarantee the perpetuation of the acts through the use of Allah's name since it is not possible to perpetuate it in the name of the specific interest or welfare itself. For example, consider the system of monarchy in any nation. It is only the desire of the sovereign to perpetuate this system that causes him to safeguard it in the name of Allah and His Prophet (SAW). As a result, leadership of the nation is inherited as one would inherit any other legacy. Oaths of allegiance are sworn for this purpose and are regarded as drawing one closer to Allah; abstaining from doing so is regarded as being detrimental to Islam. Since the inheritance of position is not advocated by Islam, how can it be one of its laws? This is an example of a forbidden innovation in matters of convention, as has been determined by scholars.

Another example is the enforcement of taxes and the application of its revenues according to personal whim, after it has been collected from the masses under the pretence of obedience to Allah, His Prophet and those in authority. To portray such acts to the common masses as if they have to be abided by, as one abides by other legitimate requirements of Islam, is the basis for regarding such acts as *bid'ah*.

One might ask: how does one regard such matters if they do not fall victim to such misleading portrayals? Our response is that one should consider such matters in light of what is established in the religious texts and borne out of its principles. If it conflicts with this, then it is sinful, but if not, then it is part of modern matters of convention in which religion plays no role. As a result, we can say that the enforcement of taxes according to personal whim is no different from stealing and looting, but implementing taxes for the welfare of the masses is not blameworthy in any way. We can state further that if a nation was allowed to establish its system of governance on the basis of a monarchy – as in England – where the absolute welfare overrules the monarchy, then one cannot regard its proponents as being obedient to Allah or its opponents as being sinful. This is regarded as a matter of convention that Islam does not oppose.

Professor al-'Adawī said: "Similar to (innovation with regards to convention) is the adornment of masjids with colours that distract the hearts of worshippers, or carpets with the kind of patterns that preoccupy the worshipper, or adornments of exorbitant value. If indeed, as many people believe, this is done to elevate the houses of Allah and is regarded as spending in the path of

Allah, the Most High, then it becomes an innovation that is despised. Administering the masjids by strengthening their buildings and adorning them appropriately, cleaning their walls and painting them in colours that do not distract the worshipper, carpeting them with carpets that are moderately priced, etc., does not stir up controversy and is regarded as maintenance. Those who believe in Allah and the Last day spend of their wealth in this manner."

In a sentence: innovation that enters matters of convention does so from the perspective in which it may carry implications of religious devotion. The matter goes back to the fact that despicable innovations do not prevail in matters that are purely conventional. From this, one is able to establish the rulings on innovation pertaining to matters of eating, drinking, walking and sleeping. These are all conventional matters that have been infused with religious devotion. The Lawgiver has restricted them with ordinances that are obligatory, like the prohibition of lengthening one's garment out of vanity or pride, or the recitation of the name of Allah when commencing eating and drinking and the prohibition of wasting food, or the prohibition of sleeping naked on the terrace, etc. All the matters recollected are conventional; if they become infused by innovations then it is not from the conventional perspective but rather from the perspective pertaining to the directives regarding these matters as established by the Lawgiver. If there is deviation from the legislated practice, which is now also regarded as a religious practice by which one gains closeness to Allah, then this is to be regarded as an innovation. It is, in fact, both a transgression and a *bid'ah*: a transgression because it contradicts the legislated practice of the Lawgiver and a *bid'ah* (heretical innovation) because it is taken as an act of religious devotion in this contradictory form.

Are there Established Practices (*Sunan*) in Matters of Convention?

When religion intervenes in ordinary matters of life, it does so within limits sufficient to maintain morality and to preserve welfare. It does not aim to limit freedom of creativity or ingenuity, or to impede human activity. Do the civil laws legislated and implemented in courts in the East and West aim to shackle the mind or suppress the desire of discovery? Do the social conventions that are conformed to today with regards to behaviour, visiting, invitations and similar practices aim to cause one to live within the cruelty of fanaticism and coercion? The intervention of Islam in these matters is similar in many ways to these laws and conventions, which are so easily accepted by people. Pronouncements of the Prophet (SAW) on the ethics of eating, for example, are similar to the table manners practiced by the elite; both share the same objective!

However, some Muslims are mistaken in their understanding of the relationship between their religion and these conventions. There are some who think that everything new after the Prophet (SAW) is to be regarded as an innovation and must be rejected; others interpret certain conventions that were practised by the Prophet (SAW) as if they are part of Islam and regard clinging to them as religious devotion or as something that gains one closeness to Allah. Both parties are wrong. Surely it is not permitted to reject or drive people away from conventions that were introduced after the era of the Prophet (SAW) and his companions; such conventions are not *bid'ah* in the sense that the law rejects.

For example, the first four innovations that reportedly occurred after the death of the Prophet (SAW) were: the use of sieves (to sift flour, wheat; etc), satiation (i.e., to eat to one's fullest), washing of the hands with *al-Ashnān* (a plant that was used as soap is today) after eating, and eating at tables. We do not know why these four acts were mentioned or why they were feared. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī said in response:

> We do not hold that eating at tables is prohibited (either by way of dislike or in the absolute sense[230]) as such prohibition has not been established. Concerning the view that this was an innovation that occurred after the era of the Prophet (SAW), it must be stated that not every innovation is prohibited. Prohibition pertains to any *bid'ah* that contradicts an established *Sunnah* or removes and replaces a legislative ordinance. Innovations are sometimes required in certain circumstances or under changing conditions. A table does no more then elevate food off the ground to make eating easier. There is nothing detestable in this. These four acts, which have been grouped together as innovations, are not all the same. *Al-Ashnān* is good because it promotes and facilitates cleanliness and constitutes part of washing, which is a desirable action. It was not used before because people were not used to it or because it was not well known. Sieves are used to improve food, which is allowed, and cannot be considered an excessive luxury. Finally, satiation, which is the most potent of these four, arouses the passions and circulates illness in the body.

In truth, Abū Ḥāmid's defence is unsound, even though it has noble objectives. He affirms the view that regards something that is new by way of convention as *bid'ah*. He then links what comes forth from this with results, either good or bad. In our opinion, this labelling should be rejected from the beginning as we have clearly shown the limits of what is a false innovation in

[230] *Nahi Kirāhah* and *Nahi Taḥrīm* – are jurisprudential categories of prohibition, the first translates literally as prohibition by way of detestation or dislike and the second as absolute prohibition [Translator].

Allah's religion. Abū Ḥāmid is of the opinion that eating on the floor is better than eating at the table, consoling himself with the fact that the Prophet (SAW) never ate at a table. I regard both situations as equal, as both are conventions that are not related to religious devotion. The path of closeness to Allah is far away from all of these matters. If there was something objectionable about eating at a table there would have been a prohibition against it and if there was something good about eating on the floor then it would have been obligated.

At this point we ask: Are there conventions followed by the Messenger of Allah (SAW) that are to be regarded as religious matters, where the implementer is rewarded and the abstainer is sinful? Scholars have elaborated on this issue. They have agreed that whatever the Prophet (SAW) had done within the limits of his own unique nature as a human being does not impact upon the community in any way and we are not obligated to follow his example in these matters. It is known, for example, that Khalid ibn al-Walīd ate lizard. The Prophet (SAW) felt disgusted by this as it was not customary to do so amongst his people. Yet Khalid – by this action – did not commit anything shameful.[231]

As for the practices of the Prophet (SAW) that are unrelated to his stated purpose of conveyance of the message from Allah, or the instructing of people, or the confirmation of divine ordinances, it is affirmed that in these matters as well, people are not obligated to do what he did or abstain from that which he abstained from. Before we quote statements of the scholars in this regard, we want to point out that sentiment that is inflamed by love may sometimes obligate upon itself things that Allah does not obligate upon any of his creatures. It is narrated that ʻAbdallah ibn ʻUmar used to search for the paths that were travelled by the Prophet (SAW) so that he may travel upon them. He also sought out the places in which the Prophet (SAW) had isolated himself, so that he might sit in them, and for no other purpose. Ibn ʻUmar thus obligates upon himself things that are not obligatory. The majority of the Prophet's (SAW) Companions did not incline towards such actions nor see in them any means of gaining closeness to Allah!

ʻAbdallah ibn ʻUmar is similar – with regards to these actions – to Muʻāwiyah ibn Qurrah and his father (may Allah be pleased with them all). Ibn Ḥabān narrated the following from Muʻāwiyah ibn Qurrah, who narrated from his father: "I came to Allah's Messenger (SAW) in a group from (the place of) Muzaymah and we pledged allegiance to him." The narrator of the *ḥadīth* said: "I never saw Muʻāwiyah or his son – in winter and in summer – except with their mantles

[231] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Foods, ḥadīth no. 4972.

unwrapped.[232] No one has ever said that this action is a *Sunnah* and its application by some of the Companions does not obligate it upon us in any way."

Scholars have expressed conflicting views concerning actions of the Prophet (SAW) that do not reflect the objective of gaining closeness to Allah. Some scholars say that such acts are mandatory while others say that one is allowed to either perform them or to abstain. Some exaggerate and say that it is obligatory to perform these actions while others abstain from passing any judgment at all. In my opinion, the correct view has been expressed by al-Āmidī – in his book *al-Aḥkām* – which is supported by al-'Adawī in his precise treatise on innovations and established practices. This view holds that: "A straightforward act of the Prophet (SAW) does not hold proof as an act of piety. All that it indicates is that such an act is simply not forbidden." Therefore, regarding such an act as one of piety is another matter.

The companions (may Allah be pleased with them all) were the most learned of people concerning religion and the most devoted to following Allah's Messenger (SAW) in all acts of piety. They used to observe the actions of the Prophet (SAW) and whatever appeared to them as acts that were not devotional in intent would not be regarded as part of the religion or as a ritual obligation and they would also refrain from encouraging people to perform such actions. There are many such examples:

1) When the Prophet (SAW) migrated to Madinah he travelled along the coastal route because it was the furthest away from his enemy. If a straightforward act like this indicated devotional piety then everyone travelling from Makkah to Madinah would have been required to use the coastal road in imitation of the Prophet (SAW), even if that route is longer! But none of the companions have advocated this, proving that it is not an established religious practice.

2) The Prophet (SAW) and one of his Companions had hidden in a cave from their idolatrous enemies. They spent several days in it, worshipping Allah, until they were able to continue their journey. If this straightforward act was to be regarded as mandatory then the companions would have gone to that cave to worship Allah, just as the Prophet (SAW) had done. Since it has not been transmitted to us that any of the companions went to the cave to worship, we know that worship in that specific cave is not a requirement and that a straightforward act does not imply devotional piety.

[232] *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, Book of Clothing, ḥadīth no. 3560.

3) It is narrated on the authority of Anas (may Allah be pleased with him): "The Messenger of Allah used to have straps on his sandals." This is reported by the five authorities of *ḥadīth* with the exception of Muslim.[233] The report describes the Prophet's (SAW) shoes. Therefore, is wearing such shoes an established religious practice? Does one regard whoever chooses not to wear them as a rejecter of a *Sunnah*? Or are there none that express such an opinion?

4) It is known that, before the Battle of Badr, when the Messenger of Allah (SAW) had camped at the waterhole nearest to Badr, al-Ḥubāb ibn al-Mandhr said to him: "O Messenger of Allah, has this position been indicated to you by Allah and we therefore have no choice in moving forward or retreating from it, or is it your opinion; and know that war is about strategy? The Prophet (SAW) replied that it was his opinion and that war was indeed about strategy. Al-Ḥubāb then suggested changing the campsite to a more appropriate position. The Prophet (SAW) said to him: **"You have indicated your opinion,"** and then the Prophet (SAW) adopted it.[234]

These examples show that some of the actions of the Prophet (SAW) are based on his own judgment and are not guided by revelation. Muslims are not expected to conform strictly to such actions. They should express their opinions concerning such matters, and then do what they feel is correct. The Prophet (SAW) approved of this practice and even implemented it.[235]

Inserting ordinary matters of convention into the sphere of Islam is undoubtedly harmful to Allah's religion as well as to the worldly affairs of people. It harms Islam because it widens the circle of worship acts in a manner that is based on pure fantasy. Such false acts of devotional piety cannot draw one closer to Allah.

Those who are knowledgeable about Islam know that the aspects of conveyance (*al-balāgh*) and explanation (*al-bayān*) in the Prophet's (SAW) biography are laden with examples that purify the self and awaken one's determination. Both these aspects cannot accommodate exaggeration. In

[233] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Clothing, ḥadīth no. 5460; *Sunan at-Tirmidhī,* Book of Clothing, ḥadīth no. 1695; *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, Book of Clothing, ḥadīth no. 3605; *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, Book of Clothing, ḥadīth no. 3604; *Sunan an-Nisā'ī,* Book of Adornments, ḥadīth no. 5273.
[234] Narrated by Ibn Hishām from Ibn Isḥāq, critically appraised by al-Albānī: see Shaykh al-Ghazālī's (1997) *Fiqh-U-Seerah – Understanding the Life of the Prophet Muhammad* (IIPH: Riyadh), p. 237.
[235] Paraphrased from al-'Adawī's treatise.

my opinion, such exaggeration in conventional matters is no more than a covering for short-sighted people who avoid performing obligatory and mandatory acts. You might see someone that is incapacitated when it comes to following the example of the Prophet (SAW) in purifying the self and striving against the enemy. However, he would leave this clearly established practice (*Sunnah*) and take the Prophet's (SAW) love for sweets – for example – as a practice for emulation and to express his extreme love and devotion to following the legacy of Allah's Messenger (SAW).

Many conventions followed by Allah's Messenger (SAW) may well have been in submission to the requirements of the environment or context within which he lived. That is, they are actions that apply equally to Muslims and idolaters who happened to live in the same hot climatic region. If white garments are good for repelling heat and if one extends his head-covering at the back to avoid the blaze of the sun, is it then recommended that inhabitants of cold regions wear white and extend their head-coverings to their shoulders because the Prophet (SAW) had done so? The truth is that these conventions – whether practised or preached – are not part of the message of Islam. People's livelihoods are harmed by such a parochial understanding because worldly matters are founded upon constant change. These changes should be pursued by free inquiry or else they will be touched by shortcoming and neglect. To regard some of these matters as a constitutive part of Islam is a stagnant judgment that leads to intellectual and developmental paralysis that can have dangerous consequences.

The various shackles that Muslims latch upon themselves in the name of Islam is perhaps the main reason for their backwardness in certain fields. They have, thus, become imprisoned by self-imposed shackles, unable to move, while others have progressed without any impediments. Muslims lost their spiritual and intellectual essence, which is the heart of Islam, in the time spent bound by these false shackles. Their bonds with both Islam and worldly matters thus weakened and they were defeated in both spheres.

We will conclude this topic by quoting an all-encompassing study undertaken by Shaykh Maḥmūd Shaltūt, in which he summarized the subject in a learned manner, presenting it with precision and brevity. He states:

> We have learnt from the history of Islamic Law that corruption caused by *bid'ah* sets in from three different perspectives:

a) From the perspective of *'aqīdah* (belief), where *shirk* (association with and worship of other deities by supplicating and seeking refuge and assistance from them instead of Allah) has manifested itself;

b) From the perspective of *'ibādah* (worship), where changes in the manner of performing acts of worship by either additions or shortcomings have manifested themselves; and

c) From the perspective of *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* (lawful and prohibited), where the prohibition of that which is lawful and vice versa, has manifested itself.

The researcher that inquires into the reasons that lead to *bid'ah* (heretical innovation) finds that certain factors result in innovation from the outset, while other factors assist to spread the imperatives of the innovator after the onset of these innovations. We will clarify both matters.

Causes of Innovation

1) Lack of knowledge of the sources of religious rulings, or lack of knowledge in terms of understanding these rulings in light of their sources.

2) Following prejudices or biases when deriving religious rulings.

3) Favouring rationalization over established practice in matters of religion.

We will discuss all of these causes briefly.

The First Cause - Lack of Knowledge of the Sources of Religious Rulings

We would like – before discussing the various defects arising from these causes – to establish the following:

a) The sources of legislative rulings – as is well known – are the Book of Allah (the *Qur'an*) and the Prophetic practice (*Sunnah*), in addition to consensus (*ijmā'*) and analogy (*qiyās*).

b) The general principle for all these sources, which overrides all others, is that Allah's book has the highest priority, followed by the *Sunnah*, then consensus and, finally, analogy.

c) Analogy (*qiyās*) is not resorted to in rulings pertaining to acts of worship because one of its pillars is that the ruling should be causative (*ma'lūl*), meaning that it is found elsewhere as well; worship acts are based on pure devotion as they serve the purpose of genuine trial.

The defects arising out of the first cause can be ascribed to four factors:

a) Unfamiliarity with the conventions of the Arabic language.

b) Ignorance of the Prophetic tradition.

c) Ignorance of the rank of analogy.

d) Ignorance of the position of analogy.

a) Unfamiliarity with the conventions of the Arabic language led to certain texts being understood incorrectly, resulting in the innovation of practices unknown to our predecessors. A few examples follow:

1) The claim by some that only the flesh (*laḥm*) of swine is prohibited and not its fat (*shaḥm*), on the assumption that the *Qur'an* prohibits the *laḥm* (flesh) only. This is an innovation arising from ignorance of the fact that the word *laḥm* in Arabic applies to fat as well, but not the other way round.

2) Some dialectic theologians claim that Allah has a "side" (*janb*), based on the verse: **"Lest a person should say: 'Alas, my grief that I was undutiful to Allah (*ma farrattu fi janbbillah*)'" (Q. 39: 56)**. This innovation arises from ignorance of the fact that the Arabs do not define *janb* in this linguistic construction as a reference to that well-known part of the anatomy. When you say: "This is small alongside that," you mean: "in comparison to it". It is unimaginable that such negligence could occur in respect to *janbbillah* (literally, side of Allah), such that it is understood as a reference to a part of body anatomy. It is, therefore, necessary to interpret *janb* as referring to "aspect". Imām ar-Rāzī wrote in his tafsīr: "*al-janb* is called *janb* because it is an aspect of something. If something is a necessary component or part of something it is an aspect of it. Because of the similarity that occurred between *al-janb* in the sense of anatomical part, and in the sense of being a necessary component of something or a part of it, there is surely no harm in referring to *janb* as 'the right (of)' and 'to enjoin obedience to'."

3) The Prophet (SAW) said: **"If you hear the *mu'adhdhin* (caller to prayer), then repeat his utterances and thereafter recite salutations upon me."**[236] Some people thus hold that this *ḥadīth* requires the *mu'adhdhin* to recite salutations upon the Prophet (SAW) after the *adhān*. However, they do not ask him to recite it in a manner different from the *adhān* – which is recited aloud, thereby implying that it is permissible to recite it in the same way. They direct the intent of the *ḥadīth* at the *mu'adhdhin* by holding that the address in the Prophet's (SAW) statement **"recite salutations upon me"** is applicable to all Muslims including the *mu'adhdhin*. Or, that the Prophet's (SAW) expression **"If you hear"** includes the *mu'adhdhin* because he hears himself.

[236] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Prayer, ḥadīth no. 577.

These are a few examples that illustrate how heretical innovation arises due to unfamiliarity with the Arabic language, either in its vocabulary or in its stylistic conventions. The early scholars unanimously agree that knowledge of the intricacies of the Arabic language – upon which understanding of the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* depend – is an essential prerequisite for exercising *ijtihād* (reasoned opinion), as well as for dealing with and approaching legal texts.

b) Lack of Knowledge of the Prophetic tradition encompasses the following:

1) Lack of knowledge of authentic *aḥādīth*; and

2) Lack of knowledge of the position of the *Sunnah* in legislation.

The first leads to the proscribing of rulings that have been established by such *aḥādīth* and the second results in the proscribing of authentic *aḥādīth* and the failure to implement them. They are then substituted by innovations that have no basis in legislation. The following *ḥadīth* draws attention to this: **"Surely Allah does not withdraw knowledge by snatching it away from people. Rather, He withdraws knowledge by seizing the scholars. When there are no scholars left, people take as their leaders the unlearned who, if they are questioned, answer with no knowledge, thereby misguiding themselves and others."**[237]

Another *ḥadīth* relates: **"Every messenger that is sent forth by Allah has, from amongst his people, disciples and companions that imitate his way and follow his ordinances. After them come people who say that which they do not do, and do other than that which is ordained. Whoever strives against such people with his hand is a believer; whoever strives against them with his tongue is a believer; whoever strives against them with his heart is a believer. Beyond this there remains not even the equivalent of a mustard seed in faith."**[238]

*c) Lack of knowledge of the rank of analogy (*qiyās*) in the sources of legislation. Qiyās* comes after the *Sunnah*, but it may happen that people use analogy even though an established *Sunnah* addresses the issue at hand. By failing to draw upon the established *Sunnah,* they are led to innovation (*bid'ah*). Anyone familiar with the discussions of the jurists will find many examples of this type. The clearest example relates to the view expressed by some who draw an analogy between the *mu'adhdhin* and the listener on the issue of salutations upon the Prophet (SAW) after the call to prayer. They thus insist that the *mu'adhdhin* should recite the salutations aloud as well, in spite of the fact that the *Sunnah* –

[237] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Knowledge, ḥadīth no. 4828.
[238] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Faith, ḥadīth no. 79.

which should be given priority over *qiyās* – does not validate such a position.[239] In addition, the *ḥadīth* **"when you hear the *mu'adhdhin*"** indicates by way of its style of expression that it refers to the listeners specifically, and requires them to recite salutations after the *adhān*.

d) Lack of knowledge of the position of qiyās *(analogy) in legislation.* This came about as a result of jurists from the later eras drawing analogies from acts of worship. They thus established acts that had no precedent in the *Sunnah* and which were never before reported to have been carried out even though there were no impediments blocking their implementation or the possibility of their implementation. A good example is the innovation of omitting the prayer by drawing an analogy with the permissibility of compensation for missing the fast, for which there is a textual precedent. These jurists did not stop at the point of permissibility; they expanded this and legislated juristic ploys that stripped prayer of all its spirit and effect. This innovation is one of the strangest and is appropriately referred to as a compound innovation (*al-bid'ah al-murakkabah*), pertaining to an essential ruling but containing a ploy to drop the mandatory status of the ruling for the innovator. It then regards both matters – the innovation and the ploy – as part of Islam, even though they cancel an obligation and place it beyond the sphere of obligatory responsibility but still regard it as being open to the reward that Allah has prepared for those who believe and do righteous deeds.

The Second Cause – Following Personal Prejudices or Biases when Deriving Rulings

This is brought about when the person researching rulings succumbs to his own biases, resulting in the verification of a ruling that fulfils his own objectives by seeking proofs that he is able to rely on and argue by. In reality, this validates prejudice as a principle. It infringes upon proof and judges against it, thereby overthrowing legislative proceedings and corrupting the objectives of the Lawgiver with respect to the setting up of evidence. The principle position is to derive rulings from evidence or proof and not to decide upon rulings and then search for supporting evidence.

Following personal prejudice causes deviation from Allah's straight path: **"And who is more astray than one who follows his own prejudices, without any guidance from Allah?" (Q. 28: 50).** It is also narrated in an authentic tradition that the Prophet (SAW) said: **"None of you (truly) believes until his personal prejudices submit to that which I have come with."**[240] Most of the innovations arising from this cause are introduced by greedy

[239] *As-Sunnah at-Tarkīyyah* is a category of Prophetic Practice that is derived from acts that the Prophet (SAW) explicitly did not do. Jurists regard such explicit abstentions as encompassed by the term *Sunnah*.
[240] *Al-Arba'īn an-Nawawīyyah*, an-Nawawī, ḥadīth no. 41. See also *Fatḥ al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, commentary on ḥadīth no. 6764, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Holding Steadfastly to Allah's Book and the Prophetic Practice.

individuals who serve kings and heads-of-state, with the intention of gaining worldly wealth. Perhaps most of the associated subterfuges – from which Islam is completely absolved – can be traced back to this cause. The *adhān* of the Sultan and similar innovations that we do not see except in prayers for kings and sultans is not a far-fetched example. Other examples include innovations such as portable thrones and gatherings on commemorative nights[241] sanctioned by the ruling authority and which are probably due to the wishes of a king or a recommendation of someone close to him. These practices were then inherited by the coming generation and passed on, generation after generation. It thus became common practice amongst the masses, who came to regard it as a part of the religion and rejected whoever denied these practices.

In reality, the following of personal prejudice is the worst attack against religion as it kills all good. Innovations arising from it are the most sinful in the sight of Allah and the greatest transgression against the truth. How much corruption has personal prejudice brought to laws? How much has it transformed religions? And how far has it carried human beings into clear misguidance? The innovator who succumbs to personal prejudice is undoubtedly affiliated with those who Allah describes in the following verses: **"And buy not with my verses a small price. And mix not truth with falsehood, nor conceal the truth while you know (it)" (Q. 2: 41-2).**

"Verily, those who conceal what Allah has sent down of the Book, and purchase a small gain therewith (of worldly things), they eat into their bellies nothing but fire. Allah will not speak to them on the day of Resurrection, nor purify them, and theirs will be a painful torment. Those are they who have purchased error at the price of guidance and torment at the price of forgiveness. So how bold they are (for evil deeds which will push them) to the fire. That is because Allah has sent down the Book (the *Qur'an*) in truth. And verily, those who disputed as regards the Book are far away in opposition" (Q. 2: 174-6).

The Third Cause of Innovation – Favouring Rationalization in Matters of Religion

Allah has placed a limitation upon the mind and has not made it possible for it to perceive everything. Certain things remain completely incomprehensible whereas others are comprehended on the surface, without full grasp of the essence. In spite of this innate shortcoming, the mind is able to perfectly comprehend realities that Allah has given it the ability to grasp. Perceptive abilities amongst individuals vary to a large degree. For this

[241] Sometimes also referred to as a Big Night, which is given some religious significance, like the birthday of the saint or a historical event.

reason, it is necessary – on issues that are incomprehensible to the mind and on which perceptive abilities vary – to be able to refer to a truthful informer who compels the mind to submit to his miraculous authority. Such a person is none other than the Prophet (SAW), assisted by Allah, who knows everything and has absolute knowledge of what He has created.

In accordance with this principle, Allah has sent forth his prophets to make clear to humankind that which pleases their Creator and which guarantees their happiness. It also ensures for them a great share of the goodness of this life and of the hereafter. In spite of this, people have deviated from this principle. They have elevated the mind above the level that has been predetermined by Allah. They have, in fact, made the mind Allah's authoritative source over his servants and use it to judge matters of revelation that they did not fully comprehend. They then employed it in matters of legislation and rejected anything in the transmitted traditions that they were not able to gain familiarity with by way of their intellects. They then went further, regarding the intellect as one of the sources of divine legislation. As such, they made permissible by way of their intellects that which Allah did not permit and what we have no way of knowing will ensure His pleasure.

They introduced innovations in acts of worship that were supported by their scrutinisation of the hidden underlying intentions and wisdom of the divine legislation as explained by other scholars. They thus alleged that these underlying intentions were what motivated Allah in legislating a ruling. As such, they legislated other acts of worship as a means of realizing the same underlying intentions and which were derived from what had already been legislated by Allah. Much innovation has occurred by this means.

By the judgment of this limited intellect, many matters of the hereafter that have been mentioned in authentic *aḥādīth* (traditions) have been rejected, such as the *ṣirāṭ* (path), the *mizān* (scale), the resurrection of the body, bodily punishments and pleasures, beholding Allah, and other such examples that cannot be encompassed by the intellect because it has not been created to be able to perceive these matters.

Similarly, by the judgment of this limited intellect, many of the rulings of the *Sunnah* have been discarded in pursuit of other rulings that are sounder – in their opinion – for fulfilling the required objectives of religious obligation. Also, by the judgment of this limited intellect, many acts of worship and practices, which were unknown to the most devoted of worshippers, have been established.

Just as innovations are caused by the shortcomings of the intellect, or under the pretence that underlying intentions motivate and justify legislating innovations, so too are they caused by the desire to repel a forbidden action or transgress upon an established norm. As such, innovations arise that preoccupy people and prevent them from revolting against forbidden acts under the assumption that an innovation – based on a permissible act – is better than committing a forbidden action. Examples include the recitation of the *Qur'an* in the masjid and the recitation of supplications (*du'ā'*) in front of the funeral bier (*al-janāzah*) in a loud voice to prevent – as they claim – people from chattering about worldly matters in the masjid and graveyard. Innovations introduced with the intention of acquiring extra reward from Allah are also of this category. The underlying assumption is that the sought-after reward burdens the person with a similar difficulty as the actions by which the person worships Allah. The first variation is to link that which is not enacted to that which is enacted, because it augments the objectives of the legislation. Examples include:

a) To fast without *suhūr* (i.e. eating before sunrise) because it increases the challenge of overcoming one's desires, which is the objective of the legislation of fasting.

b) Religious devotion through denying oneself permitted adornments or beautification – which are not allowed by Allah – because it augments the intended wisdom behind the prohibition of adorning oneself with gold and silk.

Other examples of this variation are:

a) To choose the more difficult of two choices in the case of conflicting narrations, even though the practice of the Prophet (SAW) was to choose the easier of the two choices when such a case arose.

b) To regard all of the actions of the Prophet (SAW) as devotional – therefore meriting emulation – even though many of them are conventional and therefore do not require emulation.

The second variation includes choosing gruelling acts of worship that the Lawgiver has not commanded, like continuous fasting, instituting celibacy or abstaining from marriage and adherence to recommended acts and practices as if they were obligatory. The Prophet (SAW) warned against all of this: **"What is wrong with people that go beyond my actions. I swear by Allah that I am more knowledgeable than them concerning Allah and more fearful than them of Him."**[242] He (SAW) also said: **"None is able to add to this religion without finally being overcome."**[243]

[242] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Holding Steadfastly to the Book of Allah and the Prophetic Practice, ḥadīth no. 6757.
[243] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Faith, ḥadīth no. 38.

The Prophet (SAW) also retorted **"Do not be too strict upon yourselves as Allah may then be strict upon you,"**[244] in response to Ibn 'Umar and a group of believers that were arguing about worship practices and wanted to burden themselves by excessive devotion. People have neglected these warnings and have invented for themselves acts of worship, methods of worship, and specific devotions for worshipping Allah. They teach these practices to their followers as if these were a very important part of the religion and ignore the fact that devotion to Allah is only achievable through compliance to Allah's laws and codes. Devotional practices are restricted to that which He has legislated and which has been transmitted by his faithful Messenger (SAW). By undertaking such actions, these people are guilty of *bid'ah* (heretical innovation) and transgression and have prevented themselves from attaining the rewards for righteous deeds. They are thus guilty of wrongdoing.

All the causes of *bid'ah* that we have recollected thus far are addressed in the following *ḥadīth*, where the Prophet (SAW) said: **"This knowledge is carried in every generation by the most fair-minded; they refute the corruption of extremists, the impersonation of fabricators and the interpretation of the ignorant."**[245] The *corruption of extremists* refers to strictness and extravagance. The *impersonation of fabricators* refers to favouring rationalization over established practices in matters of religion and succumbing to personal prejudices. The *interpretation of the ignorant* refers to lack of knowledge of the sources of legislation and the conventions of understanding them in light of these sources."

We have explained this in sufficient detail earlier so as to draw the attention of the believer and to help him avoid such practices.

[244] *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, Book of Ethics, ḥadīth no. 4258.
[245] *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ*, critically appraised by al-Albānī, ḥadīth no. 239.

AUTHOR'S CONCLUSION

When seeking Allah's pleasure through righteous deeds and steadfast commitment to His religion, perseverance becomes an obligation, even if we each must walk this path alone. I have been moved by the advice of Ibn Qayyim, which has filled my heart with joy and encouraged me to heed his words as he speaks about "those that walk the solitary path".[246] I therefore want to conclude this treatise with words of advice for those who love the truth, which will perhaps assist them to hold on to it, steadfastly and constantly. There are so many people that are ignorant of the truth and so many that turn away from it in this lifetime. Those that walk the "solitary path" – among the heedless and the resentful – are surely in need of words that are able to ease the hardships of their journey.

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The virtuous, chaste young man among peers that follow their every desire; the man who prays among those that are negligent of their prayers; the Muslim who holds steadfastly onto the Prophetic tradition among those who embrace heretical innovations and superstitions; the one who perseveres to protect the teachings of his religion among those who show no consideration for the belittling of their religion or the flaunting of that which is sacred … all of these people walk the solitary path and feel the burden of loneliness, even if they are surrounded by people. They feel isolated even if the hearts of the heedless people around them are overflowing with joy and satisfaction. However, because the truth is with them, they feel as if they are in the majority even if they are but a few. They regard others as being in the minority, even if they are many, because they follow falsehood.

This feeling of honour and self-esteem is a prerequisite for every person that walks the solitary path. It is a barrier that protects the virtues and sublime values it encompasses; it defends against the misfortunes of ignorance and crushes the arrogance of the foolish; it is able to transcend the vast distance that separates it from its intended goal without showing any concern for the traps set

[246] This is discussed in his book *Madārij as-Sālikīn*.

up along the way by highway robbers! This is not surprising, because the one who moves against the current is in need of added strength and faces a longer struggle.

The one who works for the cause of Allah among those who do nothing, and the virtuous person among those prone to vice, are both in need of unique strength to be able to remain healthy among those who are gravely ill. Just imagine what is then required from the one who aims to do away with corruption and to straighten that which is crooked. Can one imagine what is required from the one who alone seeks Allah's pleasure among those who seek only vice and who worship only dust?

Those who walk the solitary path were mentioned by the Prophet (SAW), when he said: **"Islam had begun as an isolated phenomenon and will once again become an isolated phenomenon, just as it had begun. So blessed are those who walk the solitary path."**[247] It was asked: "Who are they, O Messenger of Allah?" He said: **"Those who remain virtuous when others have become corrupt."**[248]

Imām Aḥmad reported that ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān ibn Mahdī reported from Zuhayr, from the Prophet (SAW), who said: **"Blessed are those who walk the solitary path."** It was asked: "Who are they, O Messenger of Allah?" He said: **"Those who increase, when others decrease."** This means: those who increase in good deeds, faith and God-consciousness, when others have lost it all.[249]

Al-ʿAmish narrated a tradition from Ibn Masʿūd, who said: "The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: **'Islam had begun as an isolated phenomenon and will once again become an isolated phenomenon, just as it had begun, so blessed are those who walk the solitary path.'** It was asked: 'Who are they, O Messenger of Allah?' He said: '**Those who stray from the tribes.'"**[250]

Another narration states: "'Who are those who walk the solitary path?' The Prophet (SAW) replied: **'A small group of pious people among a large group of corrupt people, and those who disobey the pious people are far more numerous than those who obey them.'"**[251]

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[247] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Faith, ḥadīth no. 208.
[248] *Musnad Aḥmad*, ḥadīth no. 16094.
[249] *Madārij as-Sālikīn*, Ibn Qayyim, 4/20.
[250] *Musnad Aḥmad*, ḥadīth no. 3596.
[251] *Musnad Aḥmad*, ḥadīth no. 6775.

Another narration states: **"The most beloved to Allah are those who walk the solitary path."** It was asked: "Who are they?" The Prophet answered: **"Those who flee, taking their religion along with them."**[252] That is, those who flee from dissension.

Another narration asks: "Who are the one's who walk the solitary path?" The Prophet answered: **"Those who revive my practices and teach them to the people."**[253]

Those who walk the solitary path, even if they are alienated from people, are not harmed by the contempt of the common masses or the hostility of people in power. They may be pressured by maladies and alienation, but this does not cause them to turn to people in search of compassion.

It is narrated that when Mūsa fled from the people of the Pharaoh, in the condition that has been mentioned in the *Qur'an* – alone, a stranger, scared and hungry – he said: "O my Lord, I am alone, I am ill, I am a stranger!" It was said: "O Mūsa, the one who is alone is such who does not have Me for company. The one who is ill is such who does not have Me as his Healer. The stranger is one who has no interaction with Me."

The truth of the matter is that if Allah fills the heart of his servant with faith, he frequently tests him with hardship along its bitter path. If he is imprisoned, it is an opportunity for seclusion; if he is banished, it affords him the opportunity to travel; if he is killed, he becomes a martyr. As a result, he is isolated from people but has a unique relationship with Allah. In his person, he embodies an entire community.

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People naturally enjoy the company of others. Coming together is a human instinct that no one doubts. But if a person's path is elevated above that of others, and his determination is far greater than that of those around him, he becomes alienated. He develops a need for companionship and for a feeling of satisfaction that can replace what he has lost. In this instance, the remembrance (*dhikr*) of Allah, the Honoured and Sublime, is his comfort in isolation, his companion in

[252] *As-Silsilāh aḍ-Ḍa'īfah*, al-Albānī, ḥadīth no. 1859.
[253] *Sunan at-Tirmidhī,* Book of Faith, ḥadīth no. 2554.

loneliness, and the oasis in which he finds rest in the expansive wasteland of the whims and caprices of the common masses and the depravity of those in authority.

The Prophetic practice (*sunnah*) and lessons from the life (*sīrah*) of the Prophet (SAW) are also a consolation that brings cheer to the one in solitude. They are a refuge that he visits ever so often, to bask in their light and to breathe in their gardens, so that he does not feel the pain of loneliness and is not overpowered by his isolation.

The Prophet (SAW) has equated turning towards Allah in times of trouble with keeping his companionship in his lifetime and joining his company in his city. He said: **"Worship in the time of turmoil is like migration (*hijra*) to me."**[254] Why would a pious believer want to strike roots and settle in this world when he is ultimately going to leave it behind and be surrounded by thousands of wandering servants of Allah.

Ibn Qayyim said:

> If Allah has granted a believer clear understanding of his religion, of the practice of his Prophet (SAW), of the *Qur'an*, and Allah has shown him the heretical innovations and misguidance that people follow, their deviation from the path that Allah's Messenger and his companions had followed, and if this believer wants to follow the straight path, then he should be prepared to face the slander of ignorant people and the followers of heretical innovations, their accusations, their degradation, their incitement and their warnings against him, just as the disbelievers had done with his predecessor and leader, the Prophet (SAW). If he invites them to the straight path and denounces their practices, they will have met their reckoning and will seek to bring down calamity upon him, attribute sorcery to him, and invoke the wrath of Satan upon him.
>
> He is alone in upholding his religion, due to the corruption of their religious practices; alone in clinging firmly to the Prophetic example, due to their firm hold on heretical innovations; alone in his belief, due to the corruption of their belief; alone in his prayers, due to the poor quality of their prayers.

Solitude can sometimes be both physical and spiritual, even though spiritual solitude is the basis of distinction and prestige. Being far away from one's homeland is like being isolated from

[254] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi'*, al-Albānī, ḥadīth no. 3974.

people and disconnected from their reality. People with far-reaching determination do not like to remain in their places of birth. They stretch their vision to the far ends of the earth and they like to travel to all corners; they are not tempted by any single location, only in as far as they are able to fulfil their calling there and give rest to their consciences. As a result, migration and travel has been the characteristic of all people of virtue and honour in every age. Their bold steps serve to widen the circumference that is granted to them in the gardens of bliss, on the day that they bid farewell to this world and return to Allah.

'Abdallah ibn 'Umar narrated that a man who was born in Madinah had died in Madinah, never having left the city. The Messenger (SAW) prayed for him and said: **"If only he had died somewhere other than the place of his birth."** A man asked, "Why, O Messenger of Allah?" The Prophet said: **"If a man dies in isolation, he is allotted a place in *jannah* the breadth of which is measured from his place of birth to the place of his death."**[255]

In another narration it is stated that Allah's Messenger (SAW) stood at the grave of someone who had died in Madinah and said: **"If only he had died in isolation."**[256]

If Muslims had understood the virtue of isolation, they would have preceded the Europeans in searching for unknown places and in spreading out widely over the earth, developing it and extracting its riches, in addition to fulfilling their universal message in the shadow of this expansive activity. Unfortunately, Muslims remained sitting in their homes until they were invaded and humiliated. The Europeans traveled to all continents and peoples, gaining dominance and prestige.

Solitude is to stand out before one's peers and to be at the forefront of the row in which one marches. The highest level of solitude is that which pushes a person forward, making him progress, until none can follow in his path, and until he disappears in the eyes of those watching from a distance. This solitary traveler who leaves behind his contemporaries in time and space sends forth for people a guiding light that illuminates their path. His solitude is, therefore, not one of isolation, but of sublimity! There are many solitary figures who, by virtue of their condition, their determination, their objectives and their principles, have left a deep impression on those who knew them and on those who discovered them later.

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[255] *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, Book of Funerals, ḥadīth no. 1603.
[256] *Kitāb al-Ghurabā'*, al-Ājirī, vol. no. 1, no. 39.

Ibn Qayyim said: “The determination of the one who knows is focused upon that which he knows – that is, upon Allah – and he is alone even among the people of the hereafter, let alone those of this world, just as the one who seeks the hereafter is alone among the people of this world.”

This solitary traveler is unique in his knowledge because his horizons are wider, his understanding is deeper and his vision is sharper. He is unique in his emotions because the illumination of divine love in his heart has excited his sentiments, deepened his emotions, and the mercy he shows to those both near and far is overwhelming. He is unique in his worship because, as worshipers and ascetics busy themselves with acts of devotion, he has work with Allah that causes him to turn his attention to his Lord, while still fulfilling the required acts of devotion. He is unique in his behaviour and his judgements because, in his solitary state, he soars above and sees that which others do not. As such, the truth of his pronouncements and actions are only grasped after some time, when those behind finally reach the lookout point he had stood on, staring at the unknown. To others it may be all the same, but he sees what they do not, and passes judgement on the basis of that which they have no insight into.

May Allah shower mercy upon those who walk the solitary path and grant them comfort in their loneliness, by leave of His Honour and Favour!

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